AN INTERVIEW WITH ISAIAH BERLIN
BY ENRIQUE KRAUZE

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Editor's Notes

Amos Oz sent us the following clarification. "In my interview with Eugene Goodheart (#3, 1982, p. 355) I made a somewhat ironical remark on George Steiner's and Noam Chomsky's views of Zionism and the Jewish people. Chomsky's opinions, which I challenge, are different from Steiner's, and deserve a separate argument."

Jerzy Kozinski's name was misspelled in Dwight Macdonald's review, "Reds: Epic Tedium" (#3, 1982).

Sheldon S. Wolin, editor of *democracy* (not *Democracy*), was mistakenly referred to as Richard Wolin in the "Comment" of #4, 1982. He also claims to have been described incorrectly as a political scientist.

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Enrique Krauze

AN INTERVIEW WITH ISAIAH BERLIN

Perhaps the most pertinent and passionate readers of Isaiah Berlin's books (especially Russian Thinkers, *which was published recently in Mexico) are Latin American liberal thinkers. History has already said its last word about Russia. The wealth of intellectual life that Berlin draws on in his book has been wiped away there. But Stavrogin, his enemies and demons, are alive and well in Latin America today. Many parallels may be drawn between ninteenth-century Russia and modern-day Latin America: a dominant peasant population with a rich and indigenous culture; the absence of a Renaissance tradition; social and economic inequality on a vast scale. There are many autocratic right-wing regimes in South America today, not unlike the tsarist regimes of the mid-nineteenth century, and at least one left-wing autocratic regime, not unlike that of the present USSR.*

Under these circumstances, our very few liberal thinkers (people like Rómulo Betancourt, Daniel Cosío Villegas, Ernesto Sábato, Octavio Paz, Mario Vargas Llosa) have been facing a growing isolation. On the one hand there is despair, ignorance, even contempt for liberal methods, values, and ideas: a lack of confidence in the ability to overthrow tyrannical regimes that are built on inequality, injustice, and brute force. On the other there is a growing, almost religious, fanaticism for a vulgarized form of Marxism. Highly ideological guerrillas in El Salvador are nowadays acting—or reacting—with an utter nihilism and contempt for human life—albeit in the name of History and the masses—which only Dostoevsky could envisage.

Berlin's books and ideas are variations on the theme of liberty. This is why to hear him now is important, especially in Mexico, which has become recently an intellectual melting pot where many Latin American exiles live. His voice is also particularly important in Spain, a country that has lately recovered its freedom and is slowly but surely learning the blessings

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This interview is reprinted, in somewhat altered form, from *Vuelta,* Vol. 6, No. 66 (May 1982), the Mexican journal edited by Octavio Paz. Although the initial focus is on the relation of Isaiah Berlin's thought to that of Latin American intellectuals, Berlin's comments always have a large intellectual resonance, which is why we print this conversation here in English for the first time.

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and limits of liberty and democracy. He can remind us of another, different Russia, the one that might have been; and thus, implicitly, of a different Latin America, the one that still might be.

Enrique Krauze: How would you identify the principal causes of the historical failure of liberalism in Russia? Why did it lack intellectual and political effectiveness?

Isaiah Berlin: . . . It is usually said that the reason for the failure of the liberals was that there was no bourgeoisie in Russia, that there was no class whose needs liberals could express, nor one from which they sprang—in which they had their personal and institutional roots. . . . I don't believe this to be accurate.

The middle class was rather small, it's perfectly true—even though it had grown during the very rapid industrial expansion in the 1890s, but it had influence and even authority far beyond its numbers. The late Professor Vladimir Karpovich (of Harvard), who maintained this about both the right and the left wing of the liberals, seems to me to have been right.

According to Marxist analysis, a revolution in Russia, if it were to succeed, would need, as we all know, a highly industrialized economy, which generates a proletariat increasingly conscious, perhaps under the influence of Marxist thinkers. . . .

Only very bold Marxists openly rejected the rigorous historical determinism of Marx and Engels. Of course, Trotsky and Parvus tried to make out that there could be a revolution in Russia because of the "weakest link" theory, which means that you don't require a large proletariat, only a feeble bourgeoisie; if the bourgeoisie cannot offer much resistance it doesn't matter quite so much whether the proletariat does or does not form a decisive majority. That is a very sharp deviation from anything Marx or Engels ever said. Indeed, at least after 1850, Engels warned against precisely this kind of attempt to rebel too soon.

However, these are matters of theory. The October Revolution occurred, it succeeded against great odds and generated the present Soviet Union. If you ask why the liberals failed, this was to some degree simply because, in accordance with their principles, they were not prepared to use the violent methods used by the Bolsheviks.

The events of the last two hundred years have shown that a

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hard minority often succeeds against a soft majority. There is no doubt that the tsarist regime had been utterly discredited; that the war had greatly weakened its resources; that the middle class was not united by a single, coherent ideology. Turgenev had been a good spokesman for this class. He was a man who detested reactionaries and was terrified of the young radicals of his day. This is a well-known predicament of liberals, everywhere, at all times. Many members of the progressive Russian bourgeoisie were in this predicament. On the one hand they disliked the tsarist regime, hated tyranny, were against the ignorant and oppressive Church. On the other hand they thought that the revolutionary radicals were violent, fanatical, unscrupulous, and ruthless: they had ideals but no clear policies. In such situations small minorities can turn the scale.

This is not the first time that this has happened. I don't know how many ideologically convinced, believing fascists there were in Italy in 1922. The usual explanation is that the Italian bourgeoisie was afraid of the growth of communism and that is why it did not resist fascism. Well, you could say equally well that in Russia the liberal bourgeoisie was afraid of the return of the hated tsarist system, and therefore was not prepared to resist the Bolsheviks too much, because the Bolsheviks seemed to run the extreme left wing of what they regarded as, in some sense, their own side.

If you ask me why the liberals were crushed by the Bolsheviks, although you may think me very naive, I wish to make it clear that I do not accept the view that the explanation of historical events must always lie in the role played by class conflict. This situation does, of course, happen, but not always. Class conflict did not make the National-Socialist revolution in Germany and the Fascist revolution in Italy inevitable: they could, I believe, have been avoided. If, for example, the Communists had worked with the Social Democrats in Germany, the Nazi victory might have been prevented. If the British and the French had threatened, as they might well have done, to reoccupy the Rhineland in 1936, it might have been prevented. If you ask why these powers did not intervene—well, you can, of course, always say that everything that happens must inevitably happen because the people who are involved are what they are, but that is too fatalistic for me. I think that in 1936 the English and French, if they had had braver and wiser leaders, could have discredited the Nazi leaders. I think in 1931–33 the Social Democrats and the Communists could

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have joined forces if the Soviet Union had not decided to prevent it, by direct orders to the German Communists.

Now, if you ask why the Soviet revolution succeeded: this was in large measure due to the genius of Lenin as a man of action. If Lenin had been run over by a train and had not been there in 1917, I do not believe that Trotsky, Stalin, Kamenev, Zinoviev could have made a successful Soviet revolution. I don't know what would have happened. There might have been a civil war; you might have ended up with a right-wing or a left-wing regime, but certainly not with Leninism.

If Churchill had not been alive in 1940, it is possible that a German invasion of Britain might have been successful—at least in the short run—and things would have been very different. I have, at times, been accused of exaggerating the role of individuals in history. I do not think that I do. It seems clear to me that if Hitler had not taken it into his head to attack Russia, the situation in Europe would be totally different now. Of course, people cannot operate against conditions that they cannot change; of course, the conditions that make particular operations possible must exist, and the man who matters is the man who, in some fashion, instinctively or rationally, understands the main factors involved—such factors are not something that can be thought or wished away. This is true. But the explosion of what is called the *critical mass* can be caused by the act of an individual or a group of individuals. Yet these people need not have done what they did; in that case the critical mass might have remained quiescent.

When Engels, if it was he, said that if Napoleon had not existed a thousand other people of smaller stature would have ultimately produced the same result, I do not accept this. Somebody once said about the coin of the nineteenth century called the *Napoléon d'Or*: Change from a Napoleon is not a Napoleon. Most historians today tend to believe in the decisive influence of impersonal factors in history, whether they are Marxist or not. What I have just said would be regarded by them as a naive, old-fashioned, individualistic, subjective point of view, of no scientific validity. Yet I believe that there are turning points in history, when the acts of individuals, free to choose among alternatives, can have vast consequences.

Krauze: But wasn't there some element in Russian history, in its culture and mentality, that appealed more to Marxism than to liberalism?

Berlin: That is an exceedingly interesting question. When you have a rather primitive country that comes into contact with a civilization

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that it regards, and that regards itself, as superior, as the Russians did when they came into collision with Western Europe, its leading men are made to feel culturally self-conscious; they are made to wonder whether they really are as barbarous, backward, ignorant, as likely to remain in a condition of squalor and poverty, as the others think that they are. Naturally, they are reluctant to believe this. Then they tend to ask themselves: What can we do to pull ourselves up? They usually begin by imitating the superior foreign culture. In the end they despise themselves for this. Their natural pride is touched: they reject the idea that they are as degraded as they are evidently thought to be. They insist that they possess something uniquely valuable that the others do not have or even understand. There are many examples of this. The Germans went through this process vis-à-vis the French in the eighteenth century. The French in their glory looked upon the Germans with considerable contempt as a lot of provincials beyond the frontiers of high culture. The Germans responded by saying to themselves that while, no doubt, the French were dominant in art, in war, in politics, in power—in many spheres—the only thing that, in the end, truly mattered was the inner life. And that they had. What mattered most of all was the relation of man to God and of man to himself. The French were clever, superficial, cold, materialistic, purblind—unaware of that which alone made life worth living; they, the Germans, on the other hand, were ready to give up everything for what alone gave all other things their worth—the life of the spirit. This is a sublime form of sour grapes: what we cannot have is not worth having; the others have it, but it is of no worth; we possess something of supreme value—our sense of the divine, our deep understanding, our inner life. We are not corrupted or blinded by the world and the pleasures of the flesh, materialistic civilization.

This is, roughly speaking, what began to be believed in Russia in the late eighteenth century. The Russians felt inferior vis-à-vis the West. And after the Napoleonic wars, when they marched into Paris, they realized—or at least the well-born officers, who were, after all, the dominant element that in some ways formed opinion in Russia, realized—that Russia was at once feared and despised by Western Europe. Then the question arose: What is it that we lack? What do they have that we do not? All backward countries sooner or later ask that question of themselves, while developed countries do not.

Russian literature in the nineteenth century is largely concerned with Russian self-questioning: Where do we come from? Where are

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we going? What is our role, our mission in History? What ails us? What should we be? What can we become? These are the famous "accursed questions" in Russia: In what direction must we, can we, should we go? Will we ever become like the West? Should we seek to become so? Have we not something of supreme value that they have not? Are we not spiritually superior and should we not preserve this? Should we not insulate ourselves, as the Slavophiles are saying, against these wicked Western secular influences? Or, on the contrary, as the "Westerners" are saying: Is the truth to be found in science, enlightenment, material progress, organization, liberty, democratic ideas, John Stuart Mill? Is this what we lack and should seek? And if so, by what means? What should Russia do? What is our proper path? All this is typical of Russian thinkers and writers. Jane Austen, Dickens, did not ask, Whither England? Stendhal, Balzac, even Victor Hugo, did not say, What is the mission of France? Kant and Goethe did not ask, What is the path that Germany should tread? They spoke in universal terms: of human beings as such. But Russian literature is preoccupied with itself, with the future of Russia, in an almost narcissistic way.

This may hold in general for all backward countries, for African and Asian countries today, and perhaps for some Latin American countries as well, where there is a sense of backwardness, which some try to make a virtue while others feel ashamed of it. The way in which the Russians tried to take courage was by faith in progress, in the objective stages of history, by saying: We are taught—by Herder or Hegel, or Comte and other foreign masters—that history proceeds in a certain direction. There is a ladder of progress for all men. Where are we on this universal ladder that all nations must ascend? They spoke like men who ask: Are we on step thirty-two of the ladder of History, or only on step seventeen? And if we are only on step seventeen and wish to be on step thirty-two—like England, like Germany—how long will it take us to get there? Can we ever reach it? Can we leap over several steps at a time?

Historicism became an obsession in Russia. Professors of history used to lecture about this, particularly the "Westerners," who tried to explain how progress occurred in the West, how it occurred in progressive stages, and how Russia, despite all appearances, was ultimately on the same universal ladder. This gave the Russians a certain reason for optimism: We shall not forever remain in this position of squalor and oppression and poverty and lack of human rights. One

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day we, too, will rise. One day the sun will shine on our side of the street.

Krauze: When did this preoccupation with progress begin? It wasn't with the Bolsheviks. . . .

Berlin: It began much earlier. Alexander Herzen, for instance, who was eighteen in the forties, wondered what stage Russia had reached—although he ends by rejecting this, he ends by saying, "History has no libretto." Bakunin also did not think that history had a libretto. But other thinkers certainly supposed there was an order. So Granovsky, a famous liberal professor at the University of Moscow, thought that there was an objective series of stages of development: not a precise one, nevertheless an order; so did the elder Soloviev, the historian—and they tried to explain, in general terms, what it was. With the decay of the orthodox faith among the educated, salvation was sought in History with a capital "H." As an antidote to despair of the possibility of an effective opposition to the crushing political system, to the reign of injustice, poverty, squalor, there is a clinging to the objective movement of history—the stages through which all societies must inexorably pass. Let me give you an example of what I mean: Chernyshevsky, who is a populist, talks in this way. He said (and Herzen said it before him, and Chaadaev said it before that) that we, Russians, are moving along the same path as the West, but perhaps we do not have to go through the hell of the Industrial Revolution; maybe we can profit by the results of the Western industrial development without going through the agonies of the awful tunnel that the West had to pass through—but, having profited more or less painlessly by the fruits of Western progress, we shall then be ready to march side by side with the West towards the bright progressive future.

Or again, there is a very typical argument in the nineteenth century between the neo-Jacobin Tkachev and the semigradualist populist Lavrov, who was influenced by Marx. Tkachev, in effect, said: We must make a revolution now, we must have a *Putsch*. The peasants are a reactionary class, and will resist revolutionary change; we have to do it for them but not with them. If we don't do this, if we try to wait till the majority is with us, then what has happened in the West will happen in Russia—*embourgeoisement* will gradually occur. Where are the cadres of the revolutionaries to come from today? From among frustrated doctors, lawyers, agricultural experts who are not given the chance to develop their skills. If the tsarist government has

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any intelligence at all, it will do what the West has done and give these people opportunities. Once scientists are provided with laboratories, once doctors are given facilities for research and hospitals, once engineers are able to build dams and roads and bridges to their hearts' content, once agricultural experts are given opportunities to realize their talents, they will cease to be revolutionary, the protest will disappear and we shall become something like the capitalist Third Republic in France. And this is a betrayal of the true goals of man, of equality, of social justice, of the emancipation of labor.

To which Lavrov replied: If we impose our rule by force, we shall get the situation of the Terror in the French Revolution, created to resist counterrevolution—if we make a successful *Putsch*, then, in the course of resisting our enemies—the majority—we will militarize ourselves, and inevitably will ourselves become oppressors and tyrants. For it is clear that the only effective weapons against the counterrevolution are themselves dictatorial, otherwise it will succeed in breaking the revolutionaries. And these dictatorial methods will then be very difficult to remove. The new elite will seek to perpetuate itself, the consequence of which will be the substitution of one yoke for another. There is only one way out: to educate the working class and the intelligentsia into understanding their objective position in history; not until you have transformed their education, their minds, their outlook can you hope to create a democratic society. But to impose this kind of rule upon people who don't understand why this is being done must lead to widespread resistance, and in the end to despotism.

I mention this only to convey that the argument between *Putschism* and gradualism was conducted in historicist terms. In one case the French Revolution is invoked; in the other case the bourgeois revolution, the industrial revolutions in England and France, and the resultant bourgeois regimes. People who are as intoxicated by the idea of the objective march of history as were some of the Russians constitute a very receptive soil for Marxism. So that when Marxism came to Russia, opinion was ready—at least, portions of the intellectuals were ready—for it; and they believed in it, they believed in it passionately: for where else could salvation—in Russian conditions—be looked for?

The Russians seem to me to have a capacity for faith in ideas that is greater than that of the West. In the West many notions tend to circulate at one and the same time, and this amalgam creates what is called a *climate of opinion*. In Paris before and during 1848, for instance, a number of ideologies collided, overlapped, and mingled with each

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other. None acquired total ascendancy; none was obsessive; none was wholly dominant. In Russia there was an ideological vacuum, so that any idea that gained ground could in the relative absence of competition become very powerful. Nothing transforms ideas so much as their being taken seriously.

Krauze: Was what they had a passion for ideas or a passion for ideologies?

Berlin: They had little passion for ideas that were not ideological. The intellectuals were not greatly interested in chemical ideas or physical ideas; they were so, but not obsessively. What they wanted to know was how to live: how to organize their lives in a humanly acceptable pattern. What they wanted to know was how a decent society could be created. All Turgenev's novels are filled with this—his leading characters think about equality, about liberty, whether liberty of the individual or of the group; they seek social justice; they believe in progress. These are ethical, social, above all ideological, issues.

Krauze: Ideological issues bring us to values. Values are different and not easily reconcilable. But in the Latin American countries the common view tends to be the opposite. Equality is often understood as a kind of "melting value," a value that contains—or at least is preferable to—the rest. Could you tell us a little about the tensions between values, especially the tensions between liberty and equality?

Berlin: As you know, I believe—and so far as I can see not many writers on political or ethical issues believe—that the ultimate values that human beings pursue are not at all times the same. Throughout history there are changes, but broadly speaking there are certain basic ends that men, in various forms, pursue. All men admire courage. Most men admire intelligence. All men seek at the very least a minimum of personal liberty—perhaps not as passionately as some thinkers maintain—but they do seek to be free of chains. All men seek happiness, whether they know it or not, to some degree. Some men seek knowledge, some seek justice, power, rational organization. Some seek the realization of all their faculties. Others hate most of all being dependents, materially or spiritually. Some of these values appear to me to be ultimate values, that is, they are not means to other values. Some of them seem incompatible with one another. The classical belief is that ultimate values only seem to collide because of ignorance on our part: we do not know how to realize them all because we don't understand ourselves, don't understand nature. If we were omniscient, or at least if we knew enough, we could conceive of—and who

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knows, perhaps attain to—a harmonious society in which all these values are happily realized together. I do not myself believe this.

I do not see how complete individual liberty—which has certainly been and is a human ideal—can be reconciled with, say, untrammeled social equality. I needn't enlarge on this truism: if the strong and able are given unlimited liberty, they can destroy the stupid and weak; if the weak are to be protected from the strong, the strong must to that extent be controlled and their liberties are not unlimited. Again, too much knowledge may not be compatible with maximum happiness—it may entail anguish and suffering; there is a conflict between spontaneity and efficiency, Christian humility and "pagan self-assertiveness"—Mill's words, I think—or between some forms of creativity and perfect rationality. And so on.

In other words, when you have values that are not compatible—as these are not—you have to choose—or have some kind of compromise between the two (or three or four) that prevents too much erosion of one or another. To stop the pike from gobbling up the carp means that you have to protect the carp. But neither may you destroy the pike: they too have a certain right to exist. Hence laws, rules, control: obstacles to full freedom. This is a platitudinous statement. I am not saying anything new in explaining why one needs to have some kind of compromise between conflicting ends, which constantly breaks down and constantly has to be restored. It may be very tedious to have to do this, but that is what human life, because of its complex needs, is committed to: we cannot help our condition. A strong sense of reality may not necessarily be compatible with some forms of genius—say mathematical imagination. Yet we value both.

Krauze: Knowledge is pain?

Berlin: If, of course, you believe that knowledge always liberates, no. But I don't think it always does.

Krauze: Spinoza did. . . .

Berlin: And so did Freud and many distinguished rationalist thinkers—and there is a large amount of truth in that. But if you are an inspired artist, your art may to some extent be fed by illusion, or a peculiar, somewhat abnormal, kind of vision, or some psychological wound. If the wound is cured, you may become happier, but it is possible that you will no longer seek that realization—even salvation—in art that you did before. Not every artist, of course, is neurotic in that sense. There are sane and happy artists. Haydn, Goethe, Mendelssohn, and I dare say Shakespeare too, were not deeply wounded or deluded art-

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ists. I can easily think of performing artists who are not in the least neurotic. Nevertheless, there is an art that springs from wounds: Dostoevsky, Kafka, Pascal, Rousseau are extreme examples of artists of this well-known type.

Krauze: Or even Tolstoy . . .

Berlin: Tolstoy, indeed. I mean, if a competent psychoanalyst had treated any of these people, I don't know what we would have got in the way of literature; or if Beethoven had been psychoanalyzed in his youth; or Mozart for that matter. Knowledge does not always increase freedom. If you know that you have cancer, the knowledge is useful but it does not liberate. You try realistically to do what you can. But perhaps you would have been happier if you had not known. Ignorance can be bliss. I am not pleading against either knowledge or happiness, I merely wish to point out that not all values are necessarily compatible.

I am not saying, of course, that all ultimate values collide. They do not. But they do so often enough to create a dilemma, and the question then arises as to what to do. This happens every day. Whenever you have limited resources, there is going to be a problem. Should we build a church or a cinema? Spend our resources on an artificial lung for the gifted X, or save the ordinary Y and Z from starvation? Choices often involve loss. Should I satisfy the pious or people who love this particular form of art, save the talented painter and poet, and ignore the others—or merely offer them my sympathy?

Some thinkers have supposed that in a perfect world this wouldn't happen. I cannot see that. If we speak of a perfect world, such conflicts must not occur in it—and if the incompatible values are no longer incompatible, they come to be recognizable—we do not know what such a world would be like. If these ends are still human ends, some of them may collide in whatever world we can imagine as a possible human world. How can we imagine a world in which total spontaneity and efficiency, or the imagination of a Homer and of a civilized philosopher, go together? Hence we have to resort to what in English are called *trade-offs*. So much liberty for so much equality, so much organization for so much spontaneity; and this, of course, is not very acceptable to people because. . .

Krauze: It's not glorious enough. . . .

Berlin: It is not glorious, not exciting. Young men are not deeply inspired by the ideal of a perpetually uneasy equilibrium, which is the only thing that can keep things going without grave suffering and injustice. How much mercy for how much justice? Who shall decide? Some say

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that in the perfect world you won't need justice, in a perfect world you won't need mercy. Maybe. But in that case we can't begin to conceive of what such a world would be like.

Krauze: . . . You have been speaking of the collision of values on sociological grounds. There have been individual lives that embody within themselves these multiple tensions. We have just mentioned Tolstoy. Was he really identified or, so to speak, integrated with the absolute principles he preached?

Berlin: Let me tell a story from which you can draw your own conclusions. Late in 1904 Tolstoy was in Moscow, occupied in antiwar propaganda during the Russo-Japanese war, which he naturally hated. He was surrounded by pacifist followers. They were, I imagine, busily drafting pamphlets and letters of protest against the cruelty, wickedness, and violence of war.

One day Tolstoy, thus engaged, was sitting in his room when someone came in and said (I quote from memory: the story is told in the reminiscences of one of his children): "Lev Nikolayevitch, Port Arthur has been surrendered." He leaped to his feet and said: "In my day this would never have happened." "Why, what would have happened, Lev Nikolayevitch?" "We would have fought and fought, we would never have given it up." This was an instinctive reaction. Tolstoy admired and liked seeing well-turned-out officers in uniform. He wrote wonderfully about battles and wars. His beliefs sometimes conflicted with his habits, his tastes, his deepest instincts: he tried to alter them but never succeeded.

I was told another, equally illuminating, story by a Soviet scholar whose uncle had been a follower of Tolstoy, and from time to time stayed in Tolstoy's house in the country. One of Tolstoy's habits was to read the letters that he received in the late afternoon and then dictate answers, usually on the dictating machine that Edison had given him. The letters were usually handed to him on a silver salver by a footman in white gloves. One day the footman brought the letters without the silver salver, in his gloved hands. Tolstoy said sternly: "Where is the salver? This is what it's made for," and sent the man back to fetch it. He was and remained a Russian count. A contrite aristocrat, yes; he tried to assimilate himself to the lives of his peasants—he ate simple food, he wore a peasant's smock, he drove a plough—but it was no good. The man who really told the truth about this was Turgenev, in his last novel, *Virgin Soil*, in which the hero is an idealistic young man, a member of the gentry with intellectual interests, who moves among

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youthful revolutionaries and sympathizes with their ideals and way of life; he does his best to become one of them, but cannot do it. Towards the end he says, "I couldn't simplify myself," and commits suicide.

Tolstoy could not simplify himself. He did try very hard. His daughters in their memoirs will all tell you that he succeeded, and perhaps some of his grandchildren will too. His sons are more cautious about this. It does not seem plausible to me. There was a deep inner conflict, never resolved despite all appearances and words and writings, between the personality and the convictions; and of course, since he was one of the most intelligent human beings who ever lived, he knew this and suffered terribly.

Krauze: This is tragic for a populist. There finally could be, and should be—as Chernyshevsky, I think, thought—some ways to make a translation of the high science and technology of the West into parochial terms; this is what we ought to seek in Latin America. . . . Do you know any countries in Latin America?

Berlin: No, only Mexico. I only went to Mexico once. It was at the end of the last war and I went from Washington. I went because I felt ill and I was invited to recuperate in Cuernavaca, in the house of the American ambassador, Dwight Morrow, who was long dead by this time—but his family had a house there. And one of the sons-in-law invited me to stay and I stayed for about ten days. But I realized that Cuernavaca was not Mexico. And I only stayed in Mexico City for about two days, so I can't tell. . . .

Krauze: What about people? Which have been the people that you spontaneously recall as having made some strong personal impression on you?

Berlin: That's a very difficult question to answer. When you say a strong personal impression, do you mean people who have made an impact on me and in some way changed my way of thinking or way of living? That I would find difficult to answer. You just mean people by whom I was impressed?

Krauze: Yes.

Berlin: Oh, I am impressed by anyone of personal genius. I have the greatest possible respect for gifted individuals. I am inclined to hero worship. And if I meet a person of genius I am always happy, a little frightened, and deeply impressed. I was impressed by Bertrand Russell; I was impressed by Freud, whom I met in London in the last year of his life.

Krauze: Have you written anything about this encounter with Freud?

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Berlin: No.

Krauze: Did you have some relation with him?

Berlin: None. I simply called on him because I happened to know members of his family. I called on him and he offered me a cup of tea. I was glad to meet Virginia Woolf, too, who, in my opinion, is a writer of genius. I was deeply moved by Boris Pasternak, by Anna Akhmatova in Russia. And in quite different fashion by Edmund Wilson. By Auden, by Weizmann, by Churchill, by Einstein. I am speaking only of the dead now. I prefer not to talk about the living. Great men and geniuses—I am reverent towards them. If I meet them, I feel terrified, but I'm glad to meet them.

Krauze: Where would you say are the centers of the world's intellectual activity at this moment?

Berlin: Oh, goodness . . . I think intellectual activity today is far greater in the natural sciences than anywhere else. I'm not a scientist and don't know any science, unfortunately. It seems to me that the most gifted people today are attracted to the sciences. There is always some field of mental life that flourishes at a particular moment of history, to which imaginative and intelligent people are attracted. I think that there is today far more imagination and talent, or learning, in the natural sciences than there is in art and literature.

I'm a little melancholy about that: if you were to ask me, as I see you are on the point of doing, whether there are any writers of genius alive, novelists, poets, historians of genius . . . there are some very good novelists, poets, scholars, but novelists, poets of genius? Or painters of genius?

Krauze: Even poetry?

Berlin: There are some very good poets living, but I would rather not discuss them. Some of them are friends and there is something vulgar and embarrassing about speaking of one's friends in public. It's still worse to give marks to artists; it's amusing but vulgar and demeaning—and absurd—to produce a form-order, or give them places in league tables. And yet I think that one of the symptoms of the vitality of an art—this may seem a curious thing to say—is the existence of serious rivalry among artists. That is to say, when one writer or composer wonders whether another might outdo him. Verdi, I suspect, may have been nervous about, let us say, Gounod. And after Wagner became known, Verdi might have been slightly apprehensive about him, and relieved when he died.

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This is pure speculation, of course. I dare say even Beethoven may have wondered about, say, Weber or Cherubini. It seems absurd now, but it was probably so then. Stravinsky and Schoenberg were undoubtedly in some sense rivals. I don't believe that any composer of size today wonders uneasily about whether some other composer will put him in the shade. I don't believe that Britten wondered whether Shostakovitch or Dallapiccola would write a better opera or concerto. I don't believe that Boulez wonders whether Elliott Carter will do something more remarkable or whether Stockhausen will rise to still dizzier heights—I just don't believe it.

There are only two arts, it seems to me, where there is real competition—and vitality—today: the cinema—where producers genuinely vie with one another—and architecture. Here there is serious competition among men of authentic genius. And these arts flourish, more, it seems to me, than the others.

Krauze: You were president of Wolfson College, an institution devoted to science. . . . Had you had that experience earlier, would your ideas have changed a little about the relation between science and the humanities?

Berlin: No, I don't think so. I had been convinced for years that something had to be done about natural science at Oxford. . . . Of course there are some excellent scientists at Oxford, and many distinguished ones. But broadly speaking the emphasis has been on the humanities. That was always the tradition—and a very good tradition too—but I think on the whole people here tended to rate scientific activity—the greatest achievement of our century—incomparably so—not highly enough. In fact, it is because I thought this that I was so anxious that Wolfson College should have a scientific bias.

Krauze: What do you think of "new conservatism"?

Berlin: Who are the "new conservatives"? In England? Why do you call them "new"?

Krauze: Let me put it this way: What is the intellectual ancestry of "neoconservatives"?

Berlin: "Neo" is an attempt to give them a certain heightened value that they don't possess. "Neo" really conveys the idea of being at the forefront of history and not simply reactionary. But this is not so. Reactionaries are reactionaries, progressives are progressives, conservatives are conservatives, liberals are liberals, socialists are

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socialists. "Neosocialism"? . . . People talk about "neocommunism" and "Eurocommunism." "Neocommunism" simply means communism that is not so loyal to Leninist-Stalinist principles as it used to be. But there is little that is really "neo" about it. "Neoclassicism" I understand: that really meant imitating ancient classical models, centuries later. "Neoromanticism" I understand, because European romanticism in its richest phase came to an end, I suppose, somewhere in the 1850s or so, and after that there were other movements—positivism, naturalism, symbolism and so on—and then romanticism awoke again, in perhaps another guise—surrealism, expressionism, existentialism. But I really do not understand what is meant by "neoconservatism."

Krauze: In your essay "Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx and the Search for Identity" you study the peculiar psychological predicament of these two heirs of the newly emancipated Jews. Their lives and ideas are, in a sense, "an attempt on the part of those whom history and social circumstances had cut off from their original establishment . . . to replant themselves in some new and no less secure and nourishing soil." Ludwig Börne and Heinrich Heine, in their own ways, also had this hunger for identification, a tendency to emphasize or idealize elements of a culture to which—being Jews—they did not wholly belong. My question is: How does this particular Jewish attitude operate in your case? Could it be, for instance, that you have vindicated liberty, pushing it further than many British-born thinkers, out of a peculiar psychological condition not unlike the one you discuss in that essay?

Berlin: How can I possibly tell? Others may be in a better position to do so. I lay no claim to know much about myself—no claim to true self-knowledge. I do not know how these forces, of which I am not conscious, have shaped my life or character. You may be right about that—I have no idea. In the case of Disraeli and Marx, these were people who were affected by the rejection of newly emancipated Jews by the society around them. That is to say, by the fact that in spite of the opening of the doors of the ghetto, they did not acquire equal status. And in reaction to that, Marx suppressed his Judaism and Disraeli harped on his, exaggerated it to some extent, constantly talked about it and tried to

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dramatize it and make of it a romantic dream to satisfy his pride and give him, in his own eyes, a superior status, one that made it possible for him to operate politically as he wished. As far as I can tell, I'm not subject to either of these temptations. I have never in my life either wished not to be a Jew, or wished to be one. A Jew is a Jew, as a table is a table. Things and persons are what they are and one accepts them naturally. I've never been either proud or ashamed of being a Jew any more than I'm proud or ashamed of possessing two arms, two legs, two eyes. . . .

Krauze: Concerning the place of the history of ideas in the humanities: today's historians are mainly interested in economic and social history. Can you tell me something about the importance of the history of ideas? It has been said that it is old-fashioned. . . .

Berlin: There are two things I should like to say about that. One is—and it's a platitude—that ideas are extremely important; much more so than various Marxist and non-Marxist theories have made them out to be. If you consider the impact of Marxism itself on the history of the world, it's a history that could scarcely have occurred without it. It's a self-refuting doctrine for Marxism to maintain that ideas are, in some sense, the by-product, or a kind of spiritual reflection or ideological consequence, of material circumstances. If Marx had not lived beyond the age of twelve, it seems to me that the history of Europe and the world might have been somewhat different. Christianity is an idea, Marxism is an idea, Freudianism is an idea—or rather, they are clusters of ideas. Who can deny their power, their great causal influence, beyond that of the situations in which they arose?

My other thesis is this: there are people nowadays, the critics you have in mind, who maintain that it is no good treating ideas outside the context of history. In order to write about ideas you must know the people who formulated them: what their motives were, and what their purposes were, and the kind of societies in which they lived; and what problems they were trying to answer and what kind of language they used in coping with these problems (and each other). Because men think largely in words, their ideas and concepts are shaped by the usage and role played in their lives of the actual linguistic terms in which they think. We are told that unless one does this, one is not going to understand what they are saying. Therefore the way in which people, say in

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the nineteenth century, treated ideas seemed unhistorical: as when one discussed Plato as a timeless thinker without knowing anything about Athens, or talked about Spinoza without knowing anything about life and problems in Holland in the seventeenth century. But this—we are told—is a systematic distortion: all you can study is the past—history—and ideas are an intrinsic part of it; ideas must be studied through history, and not history through ideas.

I consider this to be both true and false. It is obviously true that we understand ideas best if we understand what kind of world their authors lived in and what they were trying to say and do. Men's language was plainly shaped by social and historical factors. That is a pure truism. Ideas are not impersonal entities. There is no parthenogenesis of ideas; ideas don't breed ideas; only human beings do; and since they are social creatures and subject to physical and social circumstances, one must study the thinkers as well as the thought; just as, in my view, one should study the artist as well as his art, when this is possible. T.S. Eliot clearly did not think that. He tells us that a work of art shines by its own radiance—that biographical facts, perhaps the social facts too, are not relevant to it. Well, I don't know. If art is communication, this cannot be so.

On the other hand, to dissolve ideas purely into what was thought by certain individuals in seeking answers to certain questions of their own time is also unduly narrowing. If that were true, how could we understand Plato at all? We don't know, or aren't sure, what exactly the Greek words meant to their users; we don't know what Athens looked like, whether houses in Athens were like Zulu kraals or like Aleppo. We can transport ourselves mentally, or we think we can, to medieval York, or Renaissance Florence; but Athens? We know where the *agora* was, we know where the temples were, we can see some pediments, pillars, statues. But the daily life of Athens is extremely difficult for us to recover; or the daily thoughts of Athenians. We read the comedy writers and the orators, we do our best, but it isn't easy with the evidence we have. Yet we think we understand what Plato is saying, and some are inspired by it, some are made indignant. We may, of course, systematically misunderstand it. That is a logical possibility: but if so, are our admiration for and delight in it lucky accidents? This seems improbable.

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Ideas of sufficient power and depth—that is to say, ideas that concern the central interests of human beings as such (and there is such an entity as human nature—men in the twentieth century cannot be totally different from men of the fourth or fourteenth century B.C. or there would be no understanding of the past at all)—these ideas, and the meanings of the words that express them, survive misinterpretation, just as very bad translations of works of a sufficient degree of universal significance—for example, bad translations of Shakespeare—nevertheless get through; bad translations of the Psalms (where there is a continuous tradition of what the Hebrew words mean) still mean something; indeed, a great deal. Of course historicist critics are saying something true: in order to understand ideas fully, or understand the unity of thought and practice, we have to perform difficult historical, sociological, psychological work: yet these ideas would not have survived at all if this had been indispensable to grasping something of their essence directly.

Krauze: About your transit from philosophy to history of ideas: why and when did it take place?

Berlin: I was always interested in the history of ideas, even when I was a fairly typical Oxford philosopher. It may have started, to some extent, I think, because I came from Russia and—not altogether consciously—experienced a contrast of two cultures, which makes one aware of differences of concepts, ideas, forms of life. But that was not, I think, the main cause of my interest. I was commissioned to write a book on Karl Marx, in 1933 or 1934. I didn't know much about Karl Marx, but I thought that Marxism was likely to become more important rather than less. I knew that if I didn't write a book on Marx, I would never bring myself to discover what Marxism was. Marx is not the clearest of writers; his disciples increase the difficulty by evasion and obscurity; and it did not seem tempting to read volumes upon volumes of Marx and Engels and their immediate disciples as an occasional intellectual occupation. At least, I did not think I could do it in this way. So I thought that if I had to write a book on Marx I would have to make myself read this body of writing, nearly all of it. In the course of reading Marx, I realized that I had to read about Marx's forerunners. I read about, and then read the works of, the French *philosophes* of the eighteenth century, to whom I was led by Engels and Plekhanov. Then I read about their critics in

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Germany: Kant, Fichte, Hegel, the opposite tradition. Then I discovered Saint-Simon and Fourier, Owen and Sismondi, and learned about conflicts between Marxism and anti-Marxism in the latter years of the century. All this was quite different from the kind of problems in the theories of knowledge or logic, or whatever it might be, in which I was professionally engaged as an Oxford philosopher. That's what really started me off on that historical path, I think. After that I never looked back.

In the end I think I ceased being a professional philosopher because I found—I think I say this in print somewhere—that I had a strong desire to know more at the end of my life than I knew at the beginning. Philosophy is not a subject that leads to an increase of knowledge about the world—to an increase of insight, of understanding, of self-knowledge, perhaps. But it is not a cumulative discipline. No scientist needs to read ancient science. Physicists do not *have* to read previous physicists. They can start in the present, at the point reached by physics. A physicist doesn't need to know the history of physics to be a good physicist. A writer doesn't have to know of previous writing; a modern historian does not have to have read ancient historians in order to be a good historian; he can be so without having read Herodotus, Thucydides, Tacitus; great historians as they are, they are not *sine quibus non* for an historian of the nineteenth century anywhere. In the case of philosophy that is not so. We do not say that there's no need to read Plato, to read Aristotle, because they are obsolete, because we have gone far beyond them. The questions Plato asked are still being asked today. The answers are different, the methods, the approach, the discussion are different, but the questions, to some extent, persist. You cannot say: We know more than Plato did; as philosophers we know more philosophy; we have no need to read our ancestors—Hume, Kant, Spinoza—we've got beyond them, they have done their indispensable work, but their day is over. However modern we are, however anxious we are to liberate ourselves from the past, we cannot help living in their intellectual shadow: the relevance of major thinkers remains. But I, for my part, had a subjective desire to know about something in the cumulative way, to know more at the end of my life than when I was young. The history of ideas provided that.

Krauze: What are you working on at this moment?

Berlin: Nothing of importance. I still have one more book to write

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before I pack up completely; I do not know if I can manage to do this. . . .

Krauze: Autobiography?

Berlin: No, no. Certainly not.

Krauze: No memoirs?

Berlin: No, no memoirs. I shall allow myself the luxury of not writing memoirs. One has to be a great deal more interested in oneself than I am to write good memoirs; and I'm not greatly interested in myself, and never have been.

I delivered some lectures more than ten years ago in Washington about some of the intellectual origins of romanticism, which I think is perhaps the biggest single shift in European thought—a mutation, as such changes are called now—since the Renaissance. It shook the classical tradition—the belief in objective knowledge of good and bad, beautiful and ugly, noble and ignoble, as well as in factual and logical truth; it stressed invention and creativity as opposed to discovery and truth. It is responsible for the dangerous but powerful and fascinating idea that men do not discover values but make them, create them; that, by rules you—or your group, nation, class, party, church—have created, you create your life; you do not imitate pre-existing eternal models. I tried to say something about this in the lectures delivered in Washington, the Mellon Lectures, and I should like to write a book about the vastly influential attack on realism, objectivity, truth, the scientific approach to the world that sprang from all this—mainly among the Germans.

Krauze: I have a last question: What do you feel about the spread of a totalitarian mentality in the Third World (and even closer—you have it here in Northern Ireland)? How do you see the role of the liberal intellectual when faced with such an acute ideological polarization?

Berlin: I think that anybody who believes that there is one truth and one truth only, and only one true path towards it, only one solution to the problems that arise and one that must be put into practice at all costs, because it alone will save his class, country, church, nation, society, party—mankind itself—anyone who believes that is likely in the end, if he acquires power, to create a situation in which blood will be shed, the blood of those who doubt or oppose him, who jeopardize the possibility of salvation. Men of this kind argue that those who do not take the one true

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path are either foolish or wicked. In either case they have to be resisted. And if they are powerful, they have to be resisted by force. This seems to me one of the most fatal beliefs that human beings can have; not only certainty that they and only they are right, but the inability to realize that there can be conflicting values, each of which intrinsically deserves to be realized, and all of which cannot be realized together.

My favorite quotation (which has at last entered *The Oxford Book of Quotations*) comes from Kant: "Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing can ever be made." Those who believe this proposition to be true, and practice it, are naturally seldom popular with either side in any human conflict. But it is they alone who make human existence tolerable.

We are saddened by the death of

DWIGHT MACDONALD,

an early associate, contributor,

and friend.

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Vladimir Nabokov

DON QUIXOTE

"Real Life" and Fiction

We shall do our best to avoid the fatal error of looking for so-called "real life" in novels. Let us not try and reconcile the fiction of facts with the facts of fiction. Ladies and gentlemen, the five books I shall discuss are fairy tales. *Don Quixote* is a fairy tale, so is *Bleak House,* so is *Dead Souls. Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenin* are supreme fairy tales. But without these fairy tales the world would not be real. A masterpiece of fiction is an original world and as such is not likely to fit the world of the reader. On the other hand, what is this vaunted "real life," what are these solid "facts"? One is suspicious of them when one sees biologists stalking each other with loaded genes, or battling historians locked in each other's arms as they roll in the dust of centuries. Whether or not his newspaper and a set of senses reduced to five are the main sources of the so-called "real life" of the so-called average man, one thing is fortunately certain: namely, that the average man himself is but a piece of fiction, a tissue of statistics.

The notion of "real life," then, is based on a system of generalities, and it is only as generalities that the so-called "facts" of so-called "real life" are in contact with a work of fiction. The less general a work of fiction is, then, the less recognizable it is in terms of "real life." Or to put it the other way around, the more vivid and new details in a work of fiction, then the more it departs from so-called "real life," since "real life" is the generalized epithet, the average emotion, the advertised multitude, the commonsensical world. I am deliberately plunging at once into rather icy waters, which is inevitable if one wishes to break the ice. There is no use, therefore, looking in these books for detailed factual representation of so-called "real life." On the other hand, between certain generali-

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ties of fiction and certain generalities of life there is some correspondence. Take physical or mental pain, for instance, or dreams, or madness, or such things as kindness, mercy, justice—take these general elements of human life, and you must agree that it should be a profitable task to study the way they are transmuted into art by masters of fiction.

The "Where" of Don Quixote

Let us not kid ourselves. Cervantes is no land surveyor. The wobbly backdrop of *Don Quixote* is fiction—and rather unsatisfactory fiction at that. With its preposterous inns full of belated characters from Italian storybooks and its preposterous mountains teeming with lovelorn poetasters disguised as Arcadian shepherds, the picture Cervantes paints of the country is about as true and typical of seventeenth-century Spain as Santa Claus is true and typical of the twentieth-century North Pole. Indeed, Cervantes seems to know Spain as little as Gogol did central Russia.

However, it is still Spain; and here is where the generalities of "real life" (in this case geography) may be applied to the generalities of a work of fiction. In a general way Don Quixote's adventures, in the First Part, take place around the villages of Argamasila and El Toboso in La Mancha, in the Castilian parched plain, and to the south in the mountains of the Morena range, Sierra Morena. I suggest that you look at these places on the map that I have drawn. Spain as you will see spreads in terms of platitudes (sorry, latitudes), degrees 43 to 36, from Massachusetts to North Carolina, with the book's main action taking place in a region corresponding to Virginia. You will find the university town of Salamanca in the west, near the border of Portugal; and you will admire Madrid and Toledo in the middle of Spain. In the Second Part of the book the general drift of the ramble takes us north toward Saragossa in Aragon but then for reasons I shall discuss later the author changes his mind and sends his hero to Barcelona instead, on the eastern coast.

If, however, we examine Don Quixote's excursions topographically, we are confronted by a ghastly muddle. I shall spare you its details and only mention the fact that throughout those adventures there is a mass of monstrous inaccuracies at every step. The author avoids descriptions that would be particular and might be verified.

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It is quite impossible to follow these rambles in central Spain across four or six provinces, in the course of which until we reach Barcelona in the northeast one does not meet with a single known town or cross a single river. Cervantes's ignorance of places is wholesale and absolute, even in respect of Argamasilla in the La Mancha district, which some consider the more or less definite starting point.

The "When" of the Book

So much for space. Now about time.

From 1667, the publication year of Milton's *Paradise Lost,* we now slide back into a sunshot hell, back to the first two decades of the seventeenth century.

Odysseus in a blaze of bronze leaping from the threshold upon the wooers; Dante shuddering at Virgil's side as sinner and snake grade into one; Satan bombing the angels—these and others exist within a form or phase of art that we call epic. Great literatures of the past seem to have to be born on the periphery of Europe, along the rim of the known world. We are aware of such southeastern, southern, and northwestern points as, respectively, Greece, Italy, and England. A fourth point is now Spain in the southwest.

What we shall witness now is the evolution of the epic form, the shedding of its metrical skin, the hoofing of its feet, a sudden fertile cross between the winged monster of the epic and the specialized prose form of entertaining narration, more or less a domesticated mammal, if I may pursue the metaphor to its lame end. The result is a fertile hybrid, a new species, the European novel.

So the place is Spain and the time is 1605 to 1615, a very handy decade easy to pocket and keep. Spanish literature flourishes, Lope de Vega writes five hundred plays which today are as dead as the armful of plays by his contemporary, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. Our man comes very softly out of his corner. I can devote only a slanting minute to his life, which, however, you will easily find in various introductions to his work. We are interested in books, not people. Of Saavedra's maimed hand you will learn not from me.

Miguel Cervantes Saavedra (1547–1616); William Shakespeare (1564–1616). The Spanish Empire was at the height of its power and fame when Cervantes was born. Its worst troubles and its best litera-

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ture began at the end of the century. Madrid in the days of Cervantes's literary apprenticeship, from 1583 onward, was alive with needy rhymesters and producers of more or less polished Castilian prose. There was, as I have already said, Lope de Vega, who completely overshadowed the playwright Cervantes and could write an entire play within twenty-four hours with all the jokes and deaths necessary. There was Cervantes himself—a failure as a soldier, as a poet, as a playwright, as an official (he was paid sixty cents a day for requisitioning wheat for the luckless Spanish Armada)—and then, in 1605, he produced the First Part of *Don Quixote.*

It may be worthwhile to cast a rapid glance over the world of letters between 1605 and 1615, in which years both parts of *Don Quixote* were produced. One thing catches the fancy of this observer: it is the almost pathological orgy of sonnet making throughout Europe, in Italy, Spain, England, Poland, France; the queer, but not wholly contemptible, urge to cage an emotion, an image, or an idea within a cell of fourteen lines, behind the gilt bars of five or seven rhymes, five in the Latin countries, seven in England.

Let us glance at England. In the tremendous afterglow of the Elizabethan period the great series of Shakespeare's incomparable tragedies—*Hamlet* (1601), *Othello* (1604), *Macbeth* (1605), *King Lear* (1606)—were or had just been produced. (Indeed, while Cervantes was making his mad knight, Shakespeare might have been making his mad King.) And in Shakespeare's oakshade Ben Jonson and Fletcher and a number of other dramatists grew—a dense undergrowth of talent. Shakespeare's sonnets, the ultimate reach of this type of thing, were published in 1609 and that influential monument in prose, King James's version of the Bible, came out in 1611. Milton was born in 1608, between the publication dates of the First and the Second Part of *Don Quixote.* In England's Virginia colony Captain John Smith produced his *A True Revelation* in 1608 and *A Map of Virginia* in 1612. He was the teller of the tale of Pocahontas, a rude but robust narrator, this country's first frontier writer.

For France this decade was a short period of slump between two great eras, immediately after the admirable colorful era of Ronsard the poet and of Montaigne the essayist. Poetry was dying a decorous death at the hands of pale perfectionists, perfect rhymesters but impotent visionaries, such as the famous and influential Malherbe. Such inept sentimental novels as *L'Astrée* by Honoré d'Urfe were the fashion. The next really great poet, La Fontaine, was not yet born,

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and neither Racine nor Molière the playwrights were yet on the scene.

In Italy, in an age of oppression and tyranny beginning in the middle of the sixteenth century, with all thought under suspicion and all expression of thought fettered, the decade we are discussing is one of inflated poetry with nothing worth mentioning beyond the extravagant metaphors and far-fetched conceits of Giovanni Marini and his followers. Torquato Tasso, the poet, had completed his tragically botched life ten years before, and Giordano Bruno, the great independent thinker, had just been burnt at the stake (1600).

As for Germany, no great writers are present during the decade under discussion, which corresponds to the threshold of the so-called German Renaissance (1600–1740). French literature was strongly influencing various minor poets, and there were numerous literary societies modeled on Italian ones.

In Russia between the fiery pamphlets of Ivan the Terrible, end of the sixteenth century, and the birth of the greatest of all Muscovite writers (before the nineteenth-century Renaissance), the Archpriest Avvakum (1620–1681), all we can distinguish in a protracted era of oppression and isolation are anonymous fairy tales, narrated unrhymed poems intoned by reciters singing the exploits of legendary heroes (the oldest text of these Bwilinas was written down in 1620 for an Englishman, Richard James). In Russia, as in Germany, literature was still fetal.

The General Comments of Critics

Some critics, a very vague minority long dead, have tried to prove that *Don Quixote* is but a stale farce. Others have maintained that *Don Quixote* is the greatest novel ever written. A hundred years ago one enthusiastic French critic, Sainte-Beuve, called it "the Bible of Humanity." Let us not fall under the spell of these enchanters.

The translator Samuel Putnam in the Viking edition recommends books by Bell and by Krutch on *Don Quixote.** I strongly object to many things in those books. I object to such statements as "[the] perception [of Cervantes] was as sensitive, his mind as sup-

*The following three quotations are drawn from Aubrey F. G. Bell, *Cervantes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1947).

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ple, his imagination as active, and his humor as subtle as those of Shakespeare." Oh no—even if we limit Shakespeare to his comedies, Cervantes lags behind in all those things. *Don Quixote* but squires *King Lear*—and squires him well. The only matter in which Cervantes and Shakespeare are equals is the matter of influence, of spiritual irrigation—I have in view the long shadow cast upon receptive posterity of a created image which may continue to live independently from the book itself. Shakespeare's plays, however, will continue to live, apart from the shadow they project.

It has been noted that both writers died on St. George's Day, 1616, "after having joined to slay the dragon of false appearances" as Bell puts it whimsically but incorrectly: far from slaying the dragon, Cervantes and Shakespeare each in his own way paraded the lovely beast, leading it on a leash to have its iridescent scales and melancholy eye enjoyed through the eternity of letters. (Incidentally, although the twenty-third of April is taken to be the date of both men's death—and is my birthday—Cervantes and Shakespeare died by different calendars; there is a ten-day gap between the two dates.)

Around *Don Quixote* we hear a plangent clash of opinions—sometimes with the ring of Sancho's sturdy but pedestrian mind and sometimes reminding us of Don Quixote's fury in attacking windmills. Catholics and Protestants, lean mystics and fat statesmen, well-meaning but verbose and stone-dead critics of the Sainte-Beuve, Turgenev, or Brandes type, and quadrillions of quarrelsome scholars have expressed their conflicting views about the book and the man who made it. There are those like Aubrey Bell, who thinks that no great masterpiece can be composed without the help of a universal church; he praises "the broad-minded tolerant spirit of the ecclesiastical censors in Spain" and maintains that Cervantes and his hero were good Catholics in the bosom of the good Counter Reformation. There are others—crusty Protestants—who on the contrary insinuate that Cervantes may have been in touch with the Reformers. Bell also holds that the lesson of the book is Don Quixote's presumption—the folly of aiming at the general good, a field of endeavor that belongs to the Church alone. The same school maintains that Cervantes bothered as little about the Inquisition as did the playwright Lope de Vega or the painter Velázquez so that whatever fun is poked at the priests in the book is good-natured, family fun, strictly an internal affair, cloister quips, jollities in the rose garden. But other critics harshly adopt a directly opposite point of view and try to

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prove, not very successfully, that Cervantes in *Don Quixote* fearlessly expressed his scorn for what a harsh Protestant commentator, Duffield, calls "Romish ritual" and "priestly tyranny"; and the same critic concludes that not only was Don Quixote a monomaniac but that the whole of "Spain in the sixteenth century was overrun with madmen of the same [pathological type]—men of one idea [ruling the country]"—since the king, the Inquisition, the nobles, the cardinals, the priests etc. were all dominated, as that critic violently puts it, by one overbearing conviction that the way to heaven was through a grilled door, the keys of which were in their keeping.*

We shall not follow in the dusty path of these pious or impious, impish or solemn, generalizations. It does not really matter very much whether Cervantes was a good Catholic or a bad one; it does not even matter whether he was a good or a bad man; nor do I deem very important his attitude, whatever it was, to the conditions of his day. Personally, I am more inclined to accept the view that he did not much bother about these conditions. What, however, does concern us is the book itself, a certain Spanish text in a more or less adequate English translation. Proceeding from the text, we do come, of course, across certain moral implications that have to be considered in a light that perhaps transcends the world of the book itself, and we shall not wince when we come to those thorns. *"L'homme n'est rien—l'oeuvre est tout"* (the master is nothing, the masterpiece is everything) said Flaubert. In many an art-for-art man there dwells a frustrated moralist—and there is something about the ethics of the book *Don Quixote* that casts a livid laboratory light on the proud flesh of some of its passages. . . .

General Remarks on Form

Novels can be divided into *one-track* novels and *multi-track* novels.

One track—in which there is only one major line of human existence.

*Alexander James Duffield, *Don Quixote, His Critics and Commentators* (London: C. K. Paul, 1881).

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Multi-track—in which there are two such lines, or many.

The one or many lives may be present all the time in every chapter, or else the author may use what I call the *switch,* minor or major.

Minor—when the chapters in which the major life or lives are actively present but alternate with chapters in which minor characters discuss those main lives.

Major—when in multi-track novels the author switches completely from the account of one life to the account of another, then back again. The many lives may be kept apart for long stretches, but one of the features of the multi-track novel as a literary form is that the many lives are bound to come into contact at this or that point.

Madame Bovary, for instance, is a one-track novel, with hardly any switches. *Anna Karenin* is a multi-track novel with major switches. What is *Don Quixote?* I should call it a one-and-a-half-track novel, with a few switches. Knight and squire are really one, and anyway the squire only plays up to his master; however, at a certain point in the Second Part they get separated. The switches are very crude, as the author shuttles self-consciously between Sancho's island and Don Quixote's castle, and it is a positive relief to everybody concerned—author, characters, and reader—when the two get together again and revert to their natural knight-and-squire combination.

From another point of view directed at questions of matter rather than manner, modern novels can be divided into such types as family novels, psychological novels (which are often written in the first person), mystery novels, and so on. Major works are generally a combination of various such types. Anyway, we should try not to be too pedantic in this. The whole thing may become extremely boring and the question of type really loses all interest when we are forced to tackle pretentious works of little or no artistic value, or on the other hand, to try to cram a stuffed eagle of a masterpiece into a pigeonhole.

Don Quixote belongs to a very early, very primitive type of novel. It is closely allied to the picaresque novel—from *picaro,* meaning rogue in Spanish—a type of story as old as the vineclad hills, which has a slyboots, a bum, a quack, or any more or less droll adventurer for hero. And this hero pursues a more or less antisocial or asocial

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quest, moving from job to job or from joke to joke in a series of colorful, loosely strung episodes with the comic element factually predominating over any lyrical or tragic intent. It is also significant that by selecting a bum for his hero, the author in times of political oppression when a moral message is enforced by the government or the church—it is significant that by making such a selection the author slyly sheds any dangerous responsibility for his hero's social-religious-political background since the tramp, the adventurer, the madman is fundamentally asocial and irresponsible.

Of course, in the adventures of our visionary Don we see much more than the tribulations of two grotesque characters, one lean and the other fat, but still the book belongs essentially to a primitive form, to the loosely strung, higgledy-pickled, variegated picaresque type and was accepted and enjoyed as such by the primitive reader.

The Long Shadow of Don Quixote

Through the other novelists that we shall read, *Don Quixote* will, in a way, remain with us all the time. We shall recognize his most significant and memorable characteristic, namely, *whimsical nobility,* in the quixotic owner of the anything but bleak house—John Jarndyce, one of the most appealing and appetizing characters in all fiction. When we come to Gogol's novel *Dead Souls* we shall easily discern in its pseudopicaresque pattern and in the strange quest that its hero undertakes a freakish echo and a morbid parody of Don Quixote's adventures. In regard to Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* we shall not only find that the lady herself is almost as crazily immersed in romantic meanders as our gaunt hidalgo, but we shall also discover something more interesting, namely, that Flaubert in pursuing with the utmost tenacity the grim adventure of composing his book can be termed a very Don Quixote in that most telling feature of the very great writers: honesty of unflinching art. And finally in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenin* we shall dimly recognize the earnest knight again in one of the main characters, Lyovin.

We should, therefore, imagine Don Quixote and his squire as two little silhouettes ambling in the distance against an ample flaming sunset, and their two huge black shadows, one of them especially elongated, stretching across the open country of centuries and reaching us here. . . .

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* * *

What, then, is our final judgment?

Don Quixote is one of those books that are, perhaps, more important in eccentric diffusion than in their own intrinsic value. It is significant that the work was immediately translated abroad; in fact, an English translation of the First Part appeared as early as 1612 before the Second Part appeared in Spanish, and so did the first French translation, though in 1614, to be followed by more than fifty different translations into French alone from that date to our day. (It is amusing to think that Molière, the most famous French playwright and actor, took the part of Don Quixote in a French stage adaptation in 1660.) After England and France had given the cue, the following sequence of translations took place: Italian in 1622, Dutch in 1657, Danish in 1676, German in 1794, and Russian still later. I am listing complete translations from the original, not excerpts or adaptations from the French, as for instance appeared in Germany in 1621 and 1682 respectively.

There is not much to say for Sancho. He exists only insofar as his master does. Any actor of the roly-poly school can impersonate him easily and improve on the comedy. But with Don Quixote things are different. His image is a complicated and elusive one.

From the very first, in the original itself, the figure of Don Quixote undergoes a shadowy multiplication. (1) There is the initial Señor Quijana, a humdrum country gentleman; (2) there is the final Quijano the Good, a kind of synthesis that takes into account the antithetic Don Quixote and the thetic country gentleman; (3) there is the presupposed "original," "historical" Don Quixote whom Cervantes slyly places somewhere behind the book in order to give it a "true-story" flavor; (4) there is the Don Quixote of the imagined Arabic chronicler, Cid Hamete Benengeli, who perhaps, it is amusingly assumed, underplays the valor of the Spanish knight; (5) there is the Don Quixote of the Second Part, the Knight of the Lions, in juxtaposition to the First Part Knight of the Mournful Countenance; (6) there is Carrasco's Don Quixote; (7) there is the coarse Don Quixote of the Avellaneda spurious continuation lurking in the background of the genuine Second Part. So we have at least seven colors of the Don Quixote specter in one book, merging and splitting and merging again. And beyond the horizon of the book there is the army of Don Quixotes engendered in the cesspools or

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hothouses of dishonest or conscientious translations. No wonder the good knight thrived and bred through the world, and at last was equally at home everywhere: as a carnival figure at a festival in Bolivia and as the abstract symbol of noble but spineless political aspirations in old Russia.

We are confronted by an interesting phenomenon: a literary hero losing gradually contact with the book that bore him; leaving his fatherland, leaving his creator's desk and roaming space after roaming Spain. In result, Don Quixote is greater today than he was in Cervantes's womb. He has ridden for three hundred and fifty years through the jungles and tundras of human thought—and he has gained in vitality and stature. We do not laugh at him any longer. His blazon is pity, his banner is beauty. He stands for everything that is gentle, forlorn, pure, unselfish, and gallant. The parody has become a paragon.

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Vassily P. Aksyonov

DESTRUCTION OF POMPEII

A Story for Bella

Every time you approach Pompeii you think: "Now here's a little corner of paradise." The platitude is inescapable, for prior to plunging down into Pompeii from a high point on the road above the city, you catch sight of the marvelously chiseled shoreline and white houses rising from the bay in terraces interspersed with the eternally verdant flora. The eye is captivated: greenery swirls above the city with abandon and climbs the steep gray-white wall of the mountain range that shelters the town and the shore from the north winds. And each time "all these things" (as modern idiom would have it) loom before you, you sense a powerful uplifting of the soul, some half-forgotten moment of ecstasy, and the expediency of your own presence here. And inside the car, in the space between the windshield and your own forehead that little platitude flashes by: "Now here's a little corner of paradise."

In early spring that year I set out for Pompeii with the most serious of intentions. I had made detailed preparations to spend no less than a month here, far from the frantic noise and dirty slush of Rome, in the hope of bringing a three-year project to completion, that of polishing off a major opus in my specialty. I had meticulously selected books and manuscripts and loaded them into the trunk, which also contained the clothes necessary for the "sundry occasions in Pompeiian social life." Now with respect to these "sundry occasions in Pompeiian social life," well, I must confess that I was jerking my own knee a bit there, for as I packed my suitcase, I kept saying to myself sternly—now none of those "social occasions in Pompeii." Only a jog in the mornings, work in the afternoons, a walk in the evenings, and a bit of listening to the radio before going to sleep. Track shoes with thick soles,

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Translated from the Russian by Joel Wilkinson and Slava Yastremski.

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a typewriter, and the transistor. Oh, the times I'd become entangled in the so-called romance of that seaside resort! The number of totally scandalous escapades had been so huge that it was almost by instinct, as if I were unaware of it, that I tossed into the suitcase most of my classy threads (the distinctive hallmark of our circle) for the "sundry occasions in Pompeiian social life."

In our circle the thing to do in those years was to be taken for a foreigner at first glance, but absolutely not at second glance. You were supposed to be slightly scornful of both your own (those long since recognized not to be foreigners) and of foreigners (those who were obviously not your own).

So, as I was tossing various kinds of silk shirts and sweaters from London into the suitcase, I was tacitly allowing the idea that Pompeii nonetheless would "suck me in" to slip through the net of all my strictures about serious intentions. However, since I was tossing all the stuff in haphazardly without sorting it out, I was more or less telling myself that if I should get sucked in it wouldn't be for long and that it would just be for a momentary diversion from my righteous labor.

I booked a room in the old Intourist hotel Oreanda, which faced onto a row of palm trees. In among the palms, almost obscured from the view along Shoreline Road, stood a plaster-of-Paris statue of Historic Titan painted bronze. By some strange fluke he had been dragged here to the inner courtyard of the hotel, where the masses could take no pleasure in contemplating him. To tell the truth, even if you could detach yourself from thoughts of what he represented, the figure itself still looked rather strange: a fake-bronze patrician in a thick coat who stood under the shade of palms, in the midst of magnolia leaves and the purple flowers of a Judas tree; he held his right hand outstretched, palm upwards, as if he were weighing a small watermelon or bolstering up some dairymaid's tit.

It's funny that I was in no way annoyed by having it for a neighbor! Quite to the contrary, this figure hidden from everyone except me and several other patrons of the Oreanda suddenly struck me as being a rather likable and, to a certain extent, even congenial fellow. I made a distinction between this Historic Titan of mine and all his other millions of replicas, and I pretended that he was a hypothetical consultant, adversary, and evaluator for my righteous labor.

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The Oreanda is situated on Shoreline Road, directly above the sea. Having stashed my suitcase in the room, off I went to acclimatize myself in the way creative types have traditionally "acclimatized themselves" in Pompeii. You sit on the pebbles three meters from the Mediterranean Sea with a manuscript of your cherished opus in hand, gaze at a page on which something has been inscribed, like "one can also reach this conclusion, based on the theory of disturbances, from yet another point of view once focus has been centered upon the collapse of the system which takes place under the influence of certain disturbances, when the system's energy level is expressed as E_0 and there is a total disregard of any possibility of the system's collapse." You repeat these expressive, carefully coined lines and, at the same time, attune yourself to your primeval and primordial homeland as you listen to the waves reshuffling the pebbles and deeply inhale the smells of boundless courage and joy.

Try to steer clear of Shoreline Road with its idle crowd of vacationing barbarians, the facade of the hotel covered with a scaffolding where devil-may-care painters are idling about. Don't be tempted to drop in at the café, either, where that familiar company of Romans convenes by the window on the second floor.

It went without saying that there were two or three Georgians in this company, too, who oversaw and paid for everyone, proposing toast after toast to Arabella.

"Ara-bella!" one Georgian would say, holding his wineglass high above the table.

And everyone gazed at the glass as if it were a fortuneteller's hypnotic crystal ball and repeated: "Ara-bella!"

It's funny that in the Georgian tongue *ara* is a negative particle and that Georgians, in toasting our famous Arabella, almost seemed to be consecrating their drinks to a sort of mysterious Non-Bella.

Arabella rose up from one of the small café tables and extended her glass of wine to me. She and I had been slightly acquainted, so she was holding this beverage out to me, the one luxury that she possessed, in a kind of mute gesture of welcome. Her hand had stretched through the glass and, exposed to the wrist, was now offering me something pleasant.

Should any speculative talk arise as a consequence of this, I will certainly explain that at that moment it was simply impossible for me to have had either Arabella or, what's more, the wineglass in my

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line of sight due to the obstructions in my plane of vision caused by my position.

Meanwhile, a painter had calmly climbed down the scaffolding to the café window, taken the glass from her hand, and bowed spryly to thank her. He had just about positioned his little pinkie on the glass stem so that he could partake nobly of this noble beverage when he suddenly interrupted his enchanting ritual and hollered at someone in a powerful voice: "Nikolai! Lie the brick down! I order you, lie the brick down! Lie the brick back or I'll shoot!"

There was absolutely nothing around from which he could have fired a shot. In discussions later, this fact was echoed far and wide along Shoreline Road. Why would he shout "I'll shoot" when there wasn't a weapon to fire?! He bellowed "I'll shoot," you understand, but what did he have to shoot with?! These people are really something: they shout "I'll shoot," with no firearm at hand, but what can you do about it, they're such braggarts?!

Passers-by looked to see whom this painter was shouting at so loudly and they all spotted another painter in splotchy overalls who was standing on the scaffolding and painting a third-floor balcony. He was painting away to his heart's content, sluggishly and sloppily; he blew his nose on his sleeve, not suspecting a thing. Above him, the second painter, there likewise stood on the balcony a third painter, who had a brick in his hand aimed at the crown of his co-worker's head.

A long, drawn-out second:

1) The first painter was still holding the glass of fine wine. The second painter was holding a brick aimed at the third one's head. The third painter was holding his brush with a shaky, drunken hand.

2) The second painter smashed the brick against the third painter's head. The third fell from the scaffolding onto the asphalt, where he lay sprawled out. The first painter drank down the glass of wine.

3) The painter with the empty glass in his hand dashed off somewhere—either to save the victim or to nab the criminal. The second painter, his face bathed in a dazzling smile, finished off the third painter with a second brick. And the third one, with a violent twitch, flopped onto his back and once more sprawled out, spread-eagle and motionless.

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A dark puddle began to collect.

Shoreline Road burst into a babble of shouts: "He did it for his broad, his broad, his own wife!"

Some brave individuals tore through the door leading to the balcony. The murderer, still bathed in a dazzling smile, scrambled across the railing, and his body flew head over heels, struck against the second-floor balcony, and plummeted like a sack down to the asphalt right beside the first victim; immediately a second dark puddle began to collect.

As in Bizet's opera, over a woman, a whore—the hairdresser Svetka—and out of jealousy, two skilled workmen perished in broad daylight. They hadn't even had a lot to drink.

From the crowd of vacationers under the surveillance of the voluntary militia came a steady hum of voices. The appropriate vehicle drove up and individuals designated for such tasks removed the corpses. Slowly, the vehicle moved away.

The person responsible for what had happened dashed out of the hairdressing salon on Shoreline Road. The dazzling bright polyester-clad body under her white work smock, now flung wide open, glistened with the delightful chimera of unruly flesh.

It's been reported that they had even had two kids, and some people used the past tense in reference to them because they assumed that Svetka's kids vanished together with their fathers.

The hairdresser lunged at the ambulance car with her hands; shocks of tufted red hair seemed to bounce across the roof of the vehicle. Her hands left black marks. And it's with hands like this that they shave us!

Later, I had the impression that the destruction of Pompeii began precisely from this moment. It was as if that fatal incident initiated the collapse of the resort town and all its sanatoriums, restaurants, and monuments to workers and to Historic Titan. As if the painter with the brick had given a signal to the volcano. As if only then the whiffs of smoke had begun to appear above the rocky spur suspended in the golden sky.

In actual fact, however, if there was any link between the two occurrences, it was more likely to have been the other way around: puffs of smoke began to appear much earlier. No one noticed it for a long time because, strange though it seems, the residents and tour-

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ists in Pompeii were not in the habit of observing nature closely. Generally, they observed only one another, for it was exclusively in the collection of individuals that they saw the source of their pleasures or, as it's fashionable to say now, *kaif*, their version of *la dolce vita*.

To be precise, the puffs of smoke were noticed only when they had turned into really thick smoke. However, the vacationers supposed that it was just a local tourist attraction and the natives thought it was just a case of some experiments or other being conducted in the mountains, which had to do with nothing more or less, putting it as simply and bluntly as possible, than our armed forces. The military strength of our republic was such that the possibility of any natural disaster occurring could just be dismissed.

The thought didn't even enter anybody's head, of course, to search for a link between the pink smoke in the mountains and the wave of strange acts that, like a deluge, rushed ashore. The sudden flare-up of passion in the painters' guild was just one of the many ensuing episodes.

Stories like these began to circulate:

Early one morning a highway patrol inspector was supposedly seen at one of the major intersections. He was shaving, sitting on the roof of a patrol car in front of a huge round mirror installed there to facilitate traffic safety, but certainly not for the convenience of shavers.

Rumor has it that in the Carthage Bar one evening black marketeering voluntary militia men sort of beat up a Dutch tourist. They were listening, you see, to some old baroque songs and he, you understand, was disturbing them—either by trying to peddle some piece of merchandise or by asking them to fix him up with a girl. Yet if one takes into account the special relationship between the Dutch and the People's Voluntary Militia of Pompeii, this is probably the least credible detail in all of the many strange events that were reported.

And something else, too. One couple at a dance held in the club at the Woodworking Plant shed all their clothes and gave a public exhibition of the act of coitus. What's more, they not only escaped being beaten up, but even enjoyed the loud applause of the other dancing youths. And, in addition, the club's director appeared

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before the City Council with a bouquet of wild poppies when he was summoned to undergo disciplinary criticism. What's amazing is that they accepted the bouquet.

The director of a film crew from Rome placed a call to the very same City Council and proposed, in conjunction with the film he was shooting in Pompeii about life abroad, that the whole town be converted into a film studio, that is, to restore capitalism, for all practical purposes, in Pompeii.

Also, some criminal types bashed a zinc bucket over the head of the pensioner Karandashkin, who, as a free service to his country, was selling state lottery tickets on Shoreline Road. Of the one hundred thousand tickets that the muggers took from him not one was a winning number. Subsequently, Karandashkin sent an open letter addressed to all honest people of the planet, only to have the letter published in the newspaper *The Furnace of Health.* This began a very absurd polemic, which came to a halt only after the Ideological Commission issued a direct order.

Yet the record for mindless cruelty in those days turned out to be the attack on the circus tigers by some deadbeat tramps. They chased the beasts, frightened to death, out of their cages with fire extinguishers. These tigers had performed as circus entertainers for ten generations, so they now jumped through hoops simply because of genetic traits, not in response to any training. Once they had scattered through the town and come into contact with the strange lifestyle of the resort's inhabitants and tourists, they quite naturally ran wild again. The thunderous roars of these ill-fated creatures could be heard in Pompeii right up to the last day of its existence.

However, there were also occurrences of some questionably perspicuous acts of virtue. Once, late at night, a threesome grabbed Matvei Tryapkin, the chef at the sanatorium Homeland, by his coat lapels and demanded: "You have 50 roubles?" Now where would a drunken cook get a hold of such a sum of money? The robbers frisked the poor fellow and, once they'd convinced themselves that he wasn't lying, gave him a gift of a fifty-rouble note.

What is the link between people's behavior and the action of fiery lava from the underworld—one of cause and effect or the opposite, a direct or an indirect connection? No one knows, so everyone stays confused. The pink cap on top of the volcano grew larger with each passing day.

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But oh how successfully my work progressed at the time! In the morning I would leave the hotel in my springy track shoes and begin to run up the asphalt-covered grade that led from the lower to the upper level of the park. During the minutes just before dawn, when the dark-blue crest of the horizon in the East charts its domain with special clarity because the sun is about to burst out from behind it at any moment, my brains were teeming with all sorts of good ideas. I saw page after page of my opus, "Repercussions at the Quasi-Discrete Level," dance before my eyes. And all my whole steam engine warmed up quickly, skillfully and synchronically—the lactic acid in my muscles oxydized and broke down, oxygenated hemoglobin stretched my fallen alveolae, and my esthetic gland, not to be caught napping in this burst of energy, gladly awoke and took in everything ecstatically: the tea-rose bushes that secretly and lovingly beckoned from under the stone walls where they had cornered a bit of light, the secret and slightly wanton swaying of the billowing Persian lilac, and the naively euphoric smell of the dew-drenched wisteria. What lines I managed to write then, what marvelous lines! "The system inclined towards collapse does not possess, strictly speaking, a discrete spectrum of energy. Particles which fly off during its collapse travel into infinity!" What lines!

I took breakfast right at my work table; I would eat a couple of cold, boiled eggs prepared in advance, drink some instant coffee, and read my new sentences through the window to Historic Titan. He would usually screw up his tiny barbaric eyes (a strange mixture of genes from a steppe nomad and a Swiss clerk) and stare at me in a thoroughly indecisive manner. Nonetheless, it was my impression that he condescendingly approved: Write, I say, write on. What is there, huh, to keep you from writing with your swanky gold Mont Blanc pen on the pristine page. Write, but don't forget about the people who compensated for their passion to write with prison bread and water.

The countless replicas of Historic Titan can be divided into two basic types: majestic images and lifelike images. Yet that Historic Titan of mine, secreted among Pompeii's blooming flora, was neither one nor the other. Some nameless sculptor had captured him in this émigré pose, it seems, while he was strolling casually and mindlessly. He'd probably had his quota of such empty days when he was making history: times when the movement falters and splits

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into stupid factions, the greengrocer's and butcher's bills pile up, but a ray of light, however slim, still glimmers in the kingdom of darkness—the Knopf publishers have promised an advance and in Rome the colonel of the centurions has been shot and wounded. A small matter, but all the same good news. At any rate, he could enjoy a quiet stroll with his neighbor, the tooth extractor Gruber, and say, illustrating with his characteristically Volga palm turned upwards: Well, well, Herr Gruber, you won't believe it, but it's a perfect archtypically round breast, such a compact and solid little watermelon. . . . This HT of mine was really no titan at all, just a slightly perplexed and unhealthy patrician who bathed infrequently and talked a lot. A neighbor like any other neighbor, a regular *citoyen*.

I recited to him: "— . . . as a result of the effects of relativity the level represented by the variables L and S splits up into a series of levels represented by the new quantity J. . . ."

He heard me out with no particular show of enthusiasm, but also with no strong reaction—as if he were making use of the pause to get a word in about his little watermelon.

On one paradisical morning (judge this epithet by what was said earlier), I noticed a thin crystal glass containing good wine on the palm of my Historic Titan. On the pedestal below, curled up like a pretzel, slept Arabella, her head on the historic shoes. My gaze woke her up.

"Good morning!" she said, "Do you know that Pompeii is threatened with destruction?"

"When?" I asked.

"Will three days from now suit you?" she inquired.

I thought a bit and replied, "Three days? That's a long time."

"Maybe it'll be less. Make haste."

"How did you happen to turn up here, Arabella?"

"I stumbled onto his lordship here in the bushes quite by chance. He startled me, this poor abandoned child of history. He spent a long time telling me about Astrakhan watermelons and, as always, was grossly exaggerating. However, I listened to him the whole night through. After all, he's been unfortunate and isn't understood by anyone except his poor wife. If you trace the lineage of Polovtsian aristocrats, he and I even turn out to be distant relatives. It's sad that the European branch of our ancestors split off so

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long, long ago. Their bough withered, but ours has borne fruit right up to the present. And who's to blame for that? I offered him all that I possess. The glass in his palm, you see? He's noble, you see, 'cause he hasn't touched it. He left it for me to have this morning. How sweet of him! No, no doubt about it—his private life was definitely misunderstood."

She stood up and stretched. Her white slacks and blouse were covered with bronze-colored dust. The Titan was beginning to flake here and there.

O Rome's darling, mythical Arabella! Every time you encounter her you think it's just some trick of television photography or that newly invented holography. She scampered up the statue of Historic Titan like a monkey, securing her bare feet cleverly in the sculpture's defective spots, and took the glass.

"Good morning!"

Head tossed back. Large gulps. A huge neck muscle was adeptly pumping down the moisture that had stood out overnight under the starry fermenting sky.

"What's that? Something transmitted via enemy radio stations?" I asked.

"Oh, no! I myself put it in his palm," the pretender Arabella reacted in fright, "this is my wine, I swear."

"I'm not talking about wine."

"What about, then?"

"The news. Pompeii's destruction."

"Oh, that!" she remarked, dangling her legs gaily as she hung from HT's arms. "Yes, yes. It's either the song of an angel or blatant lies from the radio."

I began to put on my track shoes.

"How's the writing coming?" Arabella asked. "Read me a few lines from 'Repercussions.' "

I obliged.

"Bravo!" she exclaimed.

"And how's your singing doing?" I inquired.

"I'm fed up with it," she said with a laugh. "You've got it easy—you sit there like a lump and write. Performing songs on TV is desperately boring."

"But your fans . . ." I started to say.

"I know, I know," she said, dismissing the comment with a wave of her hand. "I'm trying to find a different way to get them to

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prop up their existence. Are you actually getting ready to jog? Take me with you."

We started off running together—evenly and rhythmically, with the intoxicating smell of wine from her puffs of breath. But when I later glanced to my side, I no longer found her next to me. I turned completely around and, in the distance that was growing more blurry with each step, caught sight of a truck vending beer. Painters and the film people had gathered around it. Arabella, with her palms extended outwards, was encouraging our dotty citizens to prop up their existence.

That evening ash began to fall on Pompeii. A lackluster moon lit up the crest of the mountain range, above which there floated a rose-pink luminescence. Here and there, serpentines of fire crept along the wooded slopes.

Foreign radio stations were reporting Pompeii's destruction loud and clear. Our capital calmly but forcefully denied the rumors as slander.

That night I finished work on my monograph and set off for the hairdressing salon. For some reason I had a sudden urge to alter my appearance radically: maybe, to have them trim a bit off the temples or give my moustache a new twirl. In short, willy-nilly, my legs carried me off to the hairdresser's.

Picture me that evening: an enormous strapping redhead with a glint in his eyes! Good intentions forgotten. Forgotten, too, and thoroughly ventilated from my mind—the well-turned phrases in "Repercussions." Clearly realizing that Pompeii had "sucked me in" this time, I moved cheerfully towards the vortex of the "suction"—the hairdresser's. Flakes of ash flittered gracefully, swooped towards the lamplights of early evening and fell on the crowd of barbarians who, as always, were yearning for *kaif*.

A Greek liner had docked hard along Shoreline Road. Music drifted from that direction. They were playing the new hit record "Love Machine" over and over again. A teeming crowd milled around at dockside. Everyone except the most arrant lazybones was trafficking on the black market: young pioneers, pensioners, musicians, and even centurions in uniform. And just between us, there were even centurions in civilian clothes. It even seemed that the ultimate purpose of black marketeering had already been lost sight of; the primary goal of making money had been forgotten. Now it was

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merely a chaotic and greedy exchange: a hunt for clothes, drinks, various types of Japanese baubles, and tobacco.

Here I am at the hairdresser's: over the entry prerevolutionary naiads hold aloft a wreath; on the left side of the door is a memorial plaque honoring the underground meetings of the Pompeii cell of our beehive; on the right a memorial plaque honoring the visit of the "great chronicler of the twilight era when public consciousness began to fade." There remains some question as to whether he spent a long time here and what he did during his visit, whether he ever had his moustache curled or the hair on his temples trimmed.

However, it seems that during the twilight epoch there wasn't a hairdressing salon on this site, but rather a sanitary house of ill repute. Of course, perhaps this, too, was nonsense—just a city legend told with a faint jeer. Uncouth boors usually spread only spiteful and bawdy stories about the chroniclers and it's impossible now to reconstruct the truth—archives have been destroyed and the historical record has been completely distorted through propaganda.

Anyway, I walk into the reception room and right away I see my reflection in two dozen mirrors. Quite an imposing sight: the arrival at the hairdresser's of a whole crowd of enormous, redheaded machos. Two dozen armchairs and an equal number of hairdressers, too—pudgy, skinny, busty, tushy ones, in creased and soiled smocks, and all of them in the same state of intoxication. A full load of customers. One is cackling insanely, twitching in the armchair with his arms and legs; another has bent his flabby body over and is moving his hands idly back and forth above the floor as if in search of underwater treasures; a third, having grabbed the chief hairdresser by the buttocks, is swirling around on his armchair and serenading her with the waltz song "He's shy—not bold." The rest are shaving, more or less.

What's the first impulse of the redheaded giant who's just entered? Why, he'd like to drive all this rubbish out of the broadway barber's temple with a whip and at one fell swoop plop down on all twenty-four chairs, because for some reason he is insanely pleased with all two dozen of the women. A most shameful impulse, of course.

Cut down to size, I notice: here, it turns out, even the waiting line—five to seven other musclemen—has to hang around idling; in what way am I better than them?

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There's nothing that can be done about that. This is the drunken rubbish you have to live with: a community of people stuttering and slurring words and poisoned by cheap disgusting port wines, that one-rouble swill with a slimy chemical sediment, the so-called "Mumbo Jumbo." With rubbish like us, not only Pompeii but, in a year or two, even Rome will topple. But we somehow have to live together with them, that is, with ourselves, and to face destruction with them. Emigration? No, that's just smoldering embers, both inside and out.

The line rocked back and forth, drunken and pot bellied, with mindlessly smiling eyes and faces smeared with volcanic soot. No one in the present company suspected that a short distance away, on the far shore of the dark, oil-slicked sea in the "lands of Capital," hundreds of hairdressers spend their time in charitable quietude, with the reserved assurance that they can expect only upstanding customers. On the other hand, I said to myself as I joined my comrades on line, in a certain sense there is the same—if not worse—rotten smell everywhere.

"The same—if not worse—rotten smell is everywhere," I said out loud to boost the courage of my comrades.

"It's worse in our metallurgical district," said one smiling fellow.

"Why are you looking?" a second smiling fellow asked.

" 'Cause. I'm just looking," said a third smiling fellow.

"He waunts to look," uttered a fourth smiling fellow.

"Lat'm look," the fifth smiling fellow said.

"Look, if you waunt," the sixth smiling fellow said.

"Look, does no difference to me," said the seventh smiling fellow.

The redheaded giant looked at the group of port winos, not without a certain sense of horror. One of the smiling degenerates stood out from the others and made a definite impression on him: the powerful mold of a foolish old face—a retired colonel of the legion of honor. At least all these heirs of Caesarism have preserved something in their features, I thought, it may be the stability of an ungifted but majestic epoch. Should I stick with them, the last piers of society?

A peal of thunder slowly rolled over Pompeii. For a second the stormy sea was lit up. The floor of the hairdressing salon heaved vio-

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lently. The prerevolutionary Dutch tile cracked and shattered.

Perhaps all that's left is to join ranks with Caesarism, the redheaded giant thought. Theirs may be the only pillars that haven't begun to rot from the inside out. He offered the colonel a Marlboro cigarette.

"On television they're saying the overseas lands are putrifying," the colonel said, inhaling the pale blue smoke. "But actually, we've got the cesspool here and they've got the economic achievements. And what's the reason?"

"What?" the redhead asked.

"Ain't no decent organization," the colonel explained willingly. "They criticized Marshall Tarakankin and that criticism was right, I agree. However, they forgot that the Marshall had a brain. The kind of orders he gave? Why, to delay demobilization of all personnel with demerits for the same number of days as they had black marks on their record."

"Why is there no latrine here?" one smiling fellow asked in surprise. "The comrade here's pissing without the presence of a latrine."

"Every pencil wants to piss, but they hold their lead in silence," said another smiling fellow.

"Marshall Tarakankin arrived at our trireme," the colonel continued, "in time for demobilization. They saw all of that personnel off with an orchestra, but detained seaman Pushinkin for 105 days because in his three years of service he had chalked up 105 days in the brig. Everyone else returned to their productive civilian jobs, but Pushinkin roamed aimlessly through all compartments of the trireme and became disgustingly louse ridden."

"Pardon me, but what link is there between this situation and the economic lag?" the redheaded giant asked.

"They've forgotten how to organize things right," the colonel explained. "Moreover, the campaigners fighting against cosmopolitanism seriously damaged the quality of our science. Just look around—no self-respecting tomcat will eat today's sausages."

"You've got sour aspic for brains," the redheaded giant mumbled as he moved away from under the pseudo life-jacket colonnades of Caesarism, not without some dismay.

Then, yet another blow. In one terrific burst, a gust of hot wind blew down all the palms on Shoreline Road. One of the prerevolu-

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tionary naiads toppled off the frieze and cracked into pieces. The glass door to the hairdresser's shattered with a loud bang. Flakes of ash and the vile trash of this public resort flew into the salon itself. Filthy smocks clung to the extremely enticing bodies of the 24 frightful tarts.

A second or two later and there was only the barren waste of catastrophe before our eyes: crimson flashes of sheet lightning, palms bowed over by the wind's iron broom, a bloated sea with our naval fleet clumsily sliding down into its gluttonous mouth—had that poor fellow Pushinkin not served on one of those triremes?—and the torso of the naiad flung onto the street. Remember at least this, if all else is forgotten, remember at least this!

A group of youths walked past, guffawing and singing the song "Love Machine." In the process of stepping over the naiad, one of them propped his leg on her in order to lace his shoes. All's normal; life flows past, empty of memories; the organizations responsible cope with the ravages of natural disasters; the prognosis is good; Rome stands firm, unshaken.

Suddenly, all at once seven closely shaven and neatly cut citizens came out of the beauty salon.

"Next!" boomed the voice of the chief hairdresser on the loudspeaker. The PA system, it turned out, was still working there.

The redheaded giant fell onto a chair, right into a woman's eager hands. How can they condone such filth when their guild's service is public beauty? Fingers with broken nails and chipped polish darted nimbly across the redheaded client's chest, belly, and groin. A gigantic and eager mouth, smeared with lipstick, laughed above him. Tits were falling out of the unbridled polyester blouse. The wet hem of a skirt stuck to the protruding lower abdomen, and everything below brought to mind that deep-water Agave known for its passion for lurking, sucking in, and swallowing innocent fish. So, that's who's got the redheaded giant: Svetka, the disgrace of the city, the widow of the two painters.

"So, that's who's got me!" the obscene mouth laughed. "The redheaded one, red one, saucy one, shameless one! Let's get out of here, Red, let's get the hell out of here! I'll give you a shave on the beach! Take all this stuff! I'll do it to you 'deluxe' style on the beach!"

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"Excuse me, but it seems to me that's against all the rules," babbled the redheaded giant. Nevertheless, he stuffed his pockets with boxes of powder, creams, and a rubber atomizer containing Shipr cologne, and helped Svetka to take down from the wall an ancient mirror with a special golden frame.

"Tomorrow, Senkina, you will be fired for laying the customers," said the chief hairdresser.

"Watch out or you'll be sacked yourself, Shmyrkina," Svetka shouted back. "It's not a private operation we've got here, it's a guild. You yourself fuck behind the partition and the customers aren't satisfied."

A bushy crack opened up in the ceiling. A volcanic wind whirled through the salon, lifting up a tornado of cut hair. Face to face, the two women rapidly snarled at one another, something completely offensive and incomprehensible.

The redheaded giant began dragging the mirror to the beach. Behind him Svetka was dragging spotted bedsheets.

"Oh, momma dear! What a customer I've hooked, oh-ah-oh," moaned Svetka.

The redheaded giant gripped her thighs in his hands, but turned his head so as not to see her terrible face.

Waves of gray pebbles lay on the beach and in all their troughs there was grunting and squealing. Sin was being committed everywhere, and ashes fell onto all this carnal bestiality

In our case the sin was aggravated by the stupid mirror. It stood at the heads of the copulating pair, and every time the redheaded giant raised his head he could see in it his strangely undisturbed face.

Behind him, in the mirror, the crimson sea was becoming more and more luminous, the volcano was burning brighter and brighter over Pompeii. Then two chicks in hip-hugging jeans appeared in the mirror. They stood with their horsey faces downcast, swaying back and forth. One of them held her hand on her friend's pubis, while the other squeezed her friend's breast.

"Here, Galka! Look how the pros work!" one of them said, sort of hiccoughing in our direction. "But we are still trying to find our *kaif*."

Right then and there they tumbled down into some pit, where

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they expressed their ecstasy in real bawdy language: Oh, I got banged sweet, ah, I'm all wet, oh, Galka, oh, Tomka, look how starry the sky is, look a star is falling a star is falling . . .

What they took for stars were falling volcanic bombs. The torturous and jolting eruption began reducing the carnal bestiality's bellowing to an exhausted lowing.

"I tell you, Client, you made me rustle," Svetka uttered. Since Nikolai and Tolya killed each other I haven't had a feast like that."

The soot was smeared all over her face; her eyes shone thankfully.

I looked at myself in the mirror. Where had the redheaded giant disappeared to? My balding head was melting away like a candle, my body was swelling up like yeasty-beasty, sour dough.

A scorching stone crashed onto the beach, cast up a fountain of pebbles, spun like a top, and rolled into the sea, where, with a hiss, in sank in a cloud of steam.

I got up and walked away, hardly moving my elephantine feet. Buttons on my shirt popped off and my hairy black stomach hung down, suddenly unbelievably swollen.

Roofs of the houses along Shoreline Road cracked under the pounding of boulders. Broken windows were raining down. Neon letters that survived here and there spelled out *abracadabra.* A powerful flame was raging inside of a little store with the coquettish name of "Sweet Tooth." However, next to it, people who had gathered in the morning were quietly standing on line at the neighboring grocery store. They were waiting for the delivery of some fantastic boiled salt pork, although there could be no chance of a delivery since all the passes above Pompeii were enveloped with smoke and covered in flames.

Orchestras were playing everywhere. The "Love Machine" thundered from basements, from under the canopies of open-air restaurants. People of all ages danced in a frenzy. It was freedom of movement unthinkable in the times of Caesarism: eyes bulging and mouths lusting; the eerie Pompeiian shimmy. Socialism that imitates capitalism is socialistic to the point of tears.

Of all the people who had it good in the burning Pompeii, the gloomy fat guy with dirty dark locks hanging down on both sides of his balding forehead had it worst of all. The arrogant elephantine fat

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guy was meandering feebly and mindlessly through the crowd until he saw a telephone booth for long-distance calls. From that booth he could immediately plug into the capital's telephone system, but, strangely enough, it was empty: apparently, nobody had any need at all to call Rome. The fat guy stepped into the booth.

"Do you know that we are burning?" he asked his colleague at the institute, the first person whom he managed to reach by phone.

"Old man, it's too late for philosophical questions!" playfully laughed his colleague—in principle, an okay fellow, who, as a matter of fact, was no different from me: the same kind of crafty slave of the communal system that swallowed us all up.

"No, not in the philosophical sense at all," said the fat guy. "Pompeii is perishing. The volcano has gone mad."

"Well, that's no topic for a telephone conversation," his colleague uttered angrily.

Everything is clear. Now they will put me down as a provocateur. I hung up the receiver and through the glass I saw Arabella who, dancing and waving her hands, headed up a very merry company. A calm herbivorous snake was lying softly coiled around Arabella's shoulders.

"Hey, come out of there!" Arabella shouted to me. "Why are you swelling up over there in the telephone booth? Look, gentlemen, how this character has swollen up!"

A couple of merry Georgians pulled the fat guy out of the telephone booth and offered him a bottle of wonderful wine.

"Where do you get such wine?" I was surprised. "And where, in general, do you find all these nice things?" I asked simpleheartedly. "How is it that you Georgians manage to live rather sumptuously in the midst of all this wretchedness?"

"No problem," the Georgians answered merrily.

A scorching piece of rock hit the telephone booth and instantly wiped it off the face of the earth. The face of the earth, in turn, slid apart under our feet and formed a crack half a meter wide. We jumped over the crack and walked along Shoreline Road passing lines of people craving *kaif* and those having a good time inside of burning cafés.

A small clever boy, a "young naturalist," was following on Arabella's heels and whining: "Lady, give me back my yellow-belly. I took it on loan from the zoological lab for some research."

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"Child!" Arabella clasped her hands. "Do you really mean to separate us? Can't you see how your yellow-belly likes hanging around my neck? Child, the snake and I love each other!" She took the head of the yellow-belly in her palms and kissed it on the mouth. "Child, I confess that I myself am quite a yellow-belly and if you are truly a young naturalist, you must study both of us."

Something like a ball of lightning flew over Shoreline Road and hung over the main square of Pompeii, over the City Council building, and over the most powerful and majestic sculpture of Historic Titan.

"We are all yellow-bellies!" enthusiastically shouted our entire company: oh, that magnetic Arabella!

What was hanging in the distance over the square did not hang for a long time. It struck and scattered in a zillion sparks. Then, for a second, a phosphorescent light appeared and illuminated the main square. One could see the statues of various epochs falling: a border guard, a woman tractor driver, a tank driver, an astronaut . . ., — and how the principal, most powerful statue began to fall down. It became frozen in my memory just like that—in the state of leaning and falling—because the phosphorous disappeared and the crash of the statue's fall was muffled by the swelling uproar in Pompeii: orchestras, shouts, laughter, and the crackling of fires. A thought flashed through my mind—and how is mine, my personal HT, doing there, what has happened to him?

"No victims!" exclaimed one of Arabella's retinue.

"An extraordinary phenomenon of nature, comrades! A volcanic eruption with no loss of life. It is the counterpart to the neutron bomb: material goods are destroyed, people remain whole. That's precisely what I reported to Rome on the hot line: no losses of human life; courage is making a stand against the elements!"

By his entire appearance, this man, dressed in an official two-piece suit, with our beehive pin in his buttonhole, was supposed to personify the stability of our all-embracing administration, but a small muscle was twitching in his face, and a bottle of cognac was sticking out of his jacket pocket.

Arabella encouraged him with her soft palm, caressing his neatly combed hair from one side of his head to the other.

"Poor child, deserted in the midst of the fiery elements! This morning you were still reigning in your City Council office, and now you are all alone! We won't leave you! Take heart!"

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"I am taking heart," the secretary looked trustingly at Arabella. "That's exactly what I reported, I managed to say on the hot line: courage is making a stand against the elements . . ."

"Lady, give me back my yellow-belly!" begged the young naturalist. "It's time for it to eat."

Someone who appeared to have once had and lost some secret power approached, holding in his hands a bottle of Pepsi-Cola and a glass.

"Your reptile, does it eat Pepsi-Cola?" he asked the young naturalist, looking at him with his still penetrating look.

"It hasn't tried it yet," the young naturalist mumbled, "but I . . . I, personally, Comrade Colonel, eat Pepsi-Cola with pleasure."

The colonel in civilian clothes, chief of the local department of centurions in civilian clothes, began to pour the bubbling Pepsi-Cola into a glass and to treat the young naturalist and his snake to it. The boy swallowed the foreign drink greedily, while the yellow-belly hanging down from Arabella's shoulders only delicately sipped the brown moisture.

Our company was growing. It had turned into a crowd. The men and women and the young and old were walking; children and dogs were jumping up and down; cats were scurrying back and forth; and tigers from the local circus dragged along like sheep. The whole crowd was following the darling of all our people, the metropolitan area, and the barbaric regions: the television mirage, Arabella.

She once sang in an expressive voice in the attics and basements of Rome and was famous only among the attic-basement elite. Then, suddenly, this strange creature with the hypnotic voice appeared on TV in among all the mug-ugly peddlers, and all of our preposterously savage people, tired of hearing about their achievements, did not boo her; they fell in love with her. What miracle brought her into the telecommunication system? Wasn't it the first symptom of the present seismological storm?

Where were we going? For some reason, uphill—closer to the fire. Along the steep narrow streets of Pompeii, past the burning houses and closer to the scorching heat, we were ascending the Hill of Glory. In the houses, homemade vodka-distilling machinery was exploding, television tubes were bursting, and mirrors were melting, but the inhabitants for some reason didn't seem to take notice of

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the destruction of their property. Everybody was in a rush to get whatever *kaif* there was left and to join up with us.

"You've become younger again, pal," Arabella told me. "Where's your hairy belly? Where's your muddled look?"

Indeed, I felt a kind of strange youthful lightness. More and more easily, happier and happier, I was jumping over the streams of scorching lava that spread over the cobblestone road. Once, among dozens of other faces in a piece of broken glass, my reflection flashed out at me—this, it seems, is how I looked about twenty-five years ago, in my student days.

Strange transformations in age kept occurring during our entire procession: the young naturalist, for example, in his shorts was now resembling a very boring senior lecturer, and the chief of the secret service—a masturbating schoolboy, one of those who always hangs about in school restrooms.

"Stop!" the secretary of the City Council suddenly shouted. "Here's the special-supplies warehouse!"

In front of us were the smoldering ruins of quite an ordinary house. A black Tiber limousine was ablaze next to it.

"Five minutes before the destruction of the City Council building, I gave an order to Ananaskin to do a complete inventory," the secretary of the City Council explained worriedly. "Oh, no, Arabella, I assure you, I, personally, don't need anything: I'm just curious what the results were."

The gas tank in the Tiber exploded: a pastorale for the firestorm in the background. The door to the special-supplies warehouse fell off and Ananaskin appeared on the porch, hunched over from the weight of a huge smoked sturgeon that he was carrying on his back.

"Here's all I managed to save," he wheezed.

"Dear Ananaskin!" exclaimed Arabella. "Humble secret supplier! Gentle distributor with respect to labor! Are you shaking, Ananaskin? Take heart! Kiss the yellow-belly and join us."

Moaning, Ananaskin put his mouth to the snake's lips. Someone immediately came to his assistance, then a second and a third; they put their shoulders voluntarily under the beam of sturgeon, its weighty hulk.

We were drawing near to the top of the Hill of Glory where,

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among the destroyed bas-reliefs, there flickered a little ribbon of the Eternal Fire. So touching, in the raging of that Non-Eternal Fire!

"It wasn't for us that this fish swam, and it wasn't for us that they smoked it, either," Ananaskin groaned. "They were expecting an important person. But now there's no point in keeping the secret—it was the Pro-Consul himself! Fortunately, he did not arrive . . ."

"What do you mean didn't arrive?" asked a man standing behind Ananaskin's back. "Who do you think is volunteering his help with transporting this beam of sturgeon?"

The little guy turned out to be the one who had been expected with such trepidation by the entire Pompeiian administration for two weeks already—the Pro-Consul from Rome. It turned out that his plane landed right in a puddle of lava and stuck there like a fly. No car was provided and the guards ran off in different directions to the barber shops. Now the Pro-Consul was walking among the people, trying to be inconspicuous.

Behind him, under the beam, the pensioner Karandashkin was walking with a zinc pail on his head. The procession of the four volunteers was brought up in the rear by my plaster-with-pitiful-remnants-of-gilt Historic Titan from the Oreanda.

"Are you up to our sturgeon, comrades?" questioned Ananaskin.

"It's precisely labor like this that liberates peoples from those forms of exploitation that have become standard for them," Historic Titan spoke out.

"Just where is it we're going?" Karandashkin asked from under his pail. "Where will we eat this fish?"

"Don't you understand?" a Georgian dancer expressed his surprise. "Ara-bella will now sing to us from on top of the hill!"

"What a blast!" the pensioner shouted loudly.

"What a blast!" echoed the entire procession.

"How could I abandon them, these dear scarecrows?" Arabella thought with a quiet smile. "How could I deprive them of myself? What will they have without me? Sappho, George Sand?"

At the top of the Hill we all took our places. All around dry grass was burning, alabaster was melting, and the bas-reliefs of heroic deeds were tumbling down. Down below, to the thunder of its own jazz, Pompeii was collapsing.

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Flaring up higher, growing more crude,
The feast is raging, the talk is rude . . .
My dear little girl, oh, Pompeii,
Child of Caesarina and of slave . . .

Arabella sang out and then cleared her throat a bit.

"I haven't sung for a long time, but now I will sing everything for you—from the beginning to the end, or from the end to the beginning, or from the middle in both directions."

The volcano was roaring like all the radio jammers of Caesarist times and of our days put together, but the feeble voice of the singer was heard all the same.

"Whazz she singing?" asked Karandashkin, knocked off his rocker by the sturgeon, which he had never before seen or eaten in his entire life.

"She's singing her own stuff, not ours," explained the Pro-Consul sluggishly, giving rare fish its customary tribute.

"It's amazing music, not human," croaked the Historic Titan pensively, quoting his own famous thought on classical music (volume XII, chapter 2, page 10).

Flowing around the Hill of Glory, the streams of lava poured down onto Pompeii. From the top it seemed that everything was finished, but more new crowds of people still kept ascending the Hill.

There came our workers and vacationers, the crowd fishing for contemporary *kaif*, the advocates of maximum satisfaction of their own constantly growing needs. Everybody was sure that it was a live broadcast of Arabella's performance, so therefore nobody thought of the destruction of Pompeii. Television and the government know what they are doing; in this world there are no miracles.

Thus, with this faith in faithlessness, we all fell asleep on the Hill of Glory. Each of us was forgetting everything blissfully and irrevocably. For example, as my brain began to go to sleep, it was forgetting stanzas from "Repercussions," my proud work designed to win the minds of humankind, and a thought about the vanity of vanities flashed through my head, but was immediately forgotten.

Nobody woke up, even when it started to rain. Streams of water descended from the merciful heavens on high and pacified the volcano. We were sleeping in clouds of hot steam, and then under the constantly increasing gushes of a pure north wind. The wind blew away the steam and cooled off the settling lava, but we were still sleeping.

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When we woke up, a new, cool and bright day had arrived. Thousands of light, clean creatures were sitting on the Hill of Glory and didn't remember anything. A quiet and unfamiliar landscape stretched all around us. We were all looking at each other—author of "Repercussions," tamed tigers, cats, dogs, painters, film people, musicians, Arabella, Georgians, Svetka the hairdresser, the chief hairdresser, the retired colonel, the colonel of the secret police, the young naturalist, the secretary of the City Council, Karandashkin, Ananaskin, the Pro-Consul, the lesbians, Historic Titan, and all of yesterday's troglodytes of materialism. We were all looking at one another, not recognizing anybody, but loving everyone. Thousands of eyes were looking around with the hope of grasping the purpose of our awakening.

Finally, we saw a small tongue of fire at the top of the Hill and next to it there was a hot loaf of bread, a wheel of cheese, and a pitcher of water. That was our breakfast. Then we saw a narrow path that ducked in between the cliffs and rose towards a pass in the mountains. That was our way. A second later and on the steep spur of the volcano appeared a snow-white, long-haired goat. She was our guide.

That's what happened in Pompeii that year at the beginning of spring. Later on during the excavations, scientists were surprised that no traces of human bodies were found in the destroyed buildings. In only one building, something resembling a school, they found a slithering emptiness in the lava, which pointed to the fact that, probably, some time ago it was filled with the body of a small harmless snake. This allowed archaeologists to make the suggestion that the inhabitants of Pompeii kept in their houses tame herbivorous snakes called yellow-bellies.

VI—VII. 79
Written in the notebook
which was Bella's gift
in the spring of the Metropol
year.

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Judith N. Shklar

HANNAH ARENDT AS PARIAH

Hannah Arendt wanted to be and actually was a "representative" woman, in the Emersonian sense of the term: someone who both mirrors and communicates to the world at large the spirit of her people. To represent the German Jews she had to be neither particularly good, admirable, nor typical, but rather the articulate embodiment of their aspirations, general character, and in this case also their end. She indeed groomed herself for the task, because even before she had to leave Germany she began to write the life of Rahel Varnhagen, née Levin, and she kept revising this favorite of her own works for more than twenty years. Rahel was a member of the first generation of emancipated Prussian Jews and experienced all the ambiguities and difficulties of their situation, being first celebrated and then shunned by her gentile friends. Arendt deeply identified with Rahel as their common world was coming to an end, but she was also quite critical of Rahel's moral cowardice and her frantic assimilation that ended in baptism, when she married Varnhagen. It was as if Arendt were warning herself not to lapse into Jewish self-hatred. Heinrich Heine eventually saved Rahel from this blight, as Arendt learned to save herself. Characteristically, from this very first look at their situation Arendt blamed the German Jews for many of their own troubles. There was much pride in that severe judgment. It was a deliberate refusal to play the passive, pitiable victim. As an expression of public rigor and of an enduring hatred of pity, this was quite in keeping with Prussian customs, but it was meant also to stop the German Jews from thinking of themselves as helpless pawns in other people's games, without self-respect or the esteem of others. Arendt was to return to this theme over and over, often at considerable cost to herself and others.

It was in writing about Rahel that Arendt also came to divide the German Jews into two types, "the parvenus" and "the pariahs," and again she stuck to this notion for the rest of her life. Pariahs are outcasts who develop an intense sense of personal honor and pride in their status as aliens. They do not deign to toady to the hostile majority. That is what Rahel should have done from the first. Instead, even before her marriage, she was for many years a parvenu, who tried to be accepted by gentile society, that is, to become

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"an exceptional Jew," that proverbial "best friend" of every anti-Semite. The choice of the word parvenu to describe this humiliating behavior is not insignificant. It is *the* classic snob word, which is thrown at the *bourgeois gentilhomme* by the aristocrats whom he tries to join, and at the "new rich" by those who have inherited their money. The parvenu is a universal figure of ridicule and contempt. That she should have used that word for assimilated Jews tells us a good deal about Arendt. The pariah is so sure of her superiority that she no longer wishes to make efforts to join the larger society. She has, in fact, absorbed the attitudes of its upper class so completely that there is no impulse for her to rise from her actual condition. Who, after all, goes back further than "the people of the Book"? It is, nevertheless, startling to find assimilation condemned, not as false and foolish, but as vulgar. That it was useless was clear in many ways even to Rahel, who, a pariah at last, was left with nothing but her love of German literature, just as Arendt was able to salvage only her exceptional German *Bildung* when she was driven from her country in 1933.

Arendt was born in Königsberg into a complicated Jewish community. There were orthodox and also unbelieving Jews with radical political ideas, like her parents. There were Jews who thought of themselves as German citizens of the Hebrew faith, and there were Zionists. There were Jews who had recently come to the city from Eastern Europe, and others who had lived there for more than a century. There were baptized Jews, and Jews who made a point of emphasizing their Jewishness. With the exception of piety, Arendt was touched by all of these manifestations at one time or another. There was little overt anti-Semitism in Königsberg, but those born Jewish knew it, and Arendt's mother was especially firm about brooking no slighting remarks. Arendt clearly thought that neither her parents nor she were assimilated Jews. By that she seems to have meant that they had no intention of being baptized and that they openly declared their Jewishness. This was no less than their personal duty—or one should say, *Pflicht*, because it has so much more weight, especially in Prussia. By East European and even American standards Arendt was, of course, completely assimilated, a view she always found incomprehensible. That was because she clung to the bizarre notion that being Jewish was an act of personal defiance and not a matter of actively maintaining a cultural and religious tradition with its own rites and patterns of speech.

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Arendt did not get any Jewish education, but what she *did* receive was *Bildung*, and of that the best—gymnasium, private tutors, and finally a brilliant university career ending with a Ph.D. thesis on St. Augustine. By then she had done it all: Greek, Latin, philosophy, literature in every form, and all of it so completely absorbed that it was for her, and her kind, part of the natural self. At this time she also became an ardent Zionist, which had since Herzl's day appealed to those assimilated Jews who wanted Israel to be a nation like all the others. For her mentor Kurt Blumenfeld and her, Zionism was also the solution to the "Jewish Question," as the influx of unwelcome *Ostjuden* was called. Zionism was to make the Jews a single people, especially by settling the East European Jews in what is now Israel. By 1933 there really was not much choice left. Zionism was now a necessity, not one option among others.

The details of Hannah Arendt's life can be found in the biography, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, which appeared less than ten years after Arendt's death. Young-Bruehl not only vividly remembers Arendt, she was also able to talk to many of Arendt's oldest friends, and just in time, because many have died since she interviewed them. These people shared their recollections and letters freely, it seems, and the outcome is a rich and detailed biography, with all the strength and weakness of a memoir written by an admiring friend. The disadvantages of haste are that some important documents and correspondences are not yet available and that Arendt, to some degree directly, and indirectly through her friends, was able to choose what would be and what would not be revealed. There are therefore some incomplete details and omissions. The book is also often repetitious. Nevertheless, anyone who might in the future write another life of Hannah Arendt, or the history of the last generation of German Jews, will gratefully rely on this volume.

Young-Bruehl tells the first part of Arendt's story exceptionally well. She might have said a little more about the impact of the First World War, which hit Arendt and her widowed mother very hard. We know from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that Arendt herself was fully aware of the moral and cultural debasement that followed the war. The universities were a moral chaos, respect for learning was eroded, and the veterans were bitter and cynical. The best people began to ask why all those young men had continued to go to places like Flanders Field; why had they not refused? The memories of

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these years remained with Arendt for the rest of her life. So also, at a very different level, did the preoccupation with death, the void, the absence of all standards and realities, in short the condition of "nothingness."

Who can doubt that Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* must be read as a long meditation upon the moods, experiences, and intimations of that protracted horror? When Arendt eventually came to describe the alliance between "the mob" and "the déclassé élite" she was drawing Heidegger's portrait, for not only had he joined the Nazi Party, but he did so out of a long-held loathing for the pseudo-solid world of the bourgeoisie and its hypocrisies, which veiled the suffering of the soldiers with sentimental talk. That he was not just a member of the elite but a genius, and her loved and admired teacher as well, did not make these betrayals easy to bear. She did, however, have a very clear grasp of the origins of Heidegger's conduct in the trenches, and the worst she ever said of *Sein und Zeit* was that it was egoistical. Eventually she found it easy to forgive Heidegger. She had always seen through the cult that surrounded him, knowing perfectly well that none of his admirers had a clue to what he was saying. That, in fact, is still the condition of the thriving Heidegger industry. Arendt, however, not only understood him, she was and remained under his philosophical spell.

Philosophy was for both of them an act of dramatizing through word play, textual associations, bits of poetry, and other phrases their direct experiences. It was "passionate thinking." In this post-Nietzschean activity there is no pretense about pursuing the truth or any other end. Thinking is its own reward and purpose, and to outsiders it seems a random response. Only those who shared a *Bildung* and a culture could decipher it, its myths and many puns. It is also completely arbitrary. Nothing could, in any event, be more remote from either Anglo-American philosophy or traditional Continental idealism.

These philosophical habits were perfectly well suited to Arendt's political experience after the rise of Hitler. She kept them when she moved away from Heidegger and acquired other teachers, such as Karl Jaspers. By then there was only one possible form of politics: resistance, at first to fascism and then to all authorities, even in Paris. For the condition of the refugees there was a perpetual "Catch 22": no job without a work permit, and no work permit without a job. Arendt did find employment with several Jewish

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agencies and worked especially for the Youth Aliyah. She even tried, briefly, to learn Hebrew, "to know my people," but she did not get very far. She spoke no Yiddish either. She did, however, get to know a lot of Communists, thanks to both of her husbands. Traces of Marxian class analysis remained fixtures in her work, and not surprisingly, because hating the philistines and the bourgeoisie was built into her *Bildung*. Indeed Marx was one of the few philosophers of whom Heidegger spoke with some respect. At any rate a revolutionary cannot be a parvenu and, in fact, Arendt retained an abiding faith in the civic virtues of the "real" working class in contrast to "the mob." It was one of her many ahistorical fantasies.

When she arrived in America her refugee life continued under new circumstances. She managed to eke out a living by working for various Jewish agencies, papers, and publishers, and she remained involved in Zionist politics. I am not quite sure I know, after reading Young-Bruehl, what she supported, but she was certainly at odds with all sides of the American Zionist movement. From the first one gets the impression that pariah status demanded that she remain apart from all "establishment" organizations, even if they were Jewish. Eventually she joined Judah Magnes's party, which hoped for a federal binational state in Palestine. At all times it was a matter of great importance to her, however, that the Jews remain a European people, and that Israel be composed of both native-born and Diaspora Jews. She was also involved in the more typical forms of émigré politics, particularly a quarrel with the unspeakable Theodor Adorno over the disposition of the manuscripts that Walter Benjamin had entrusted to her before he killed himself.

Someone ought to write a study of émigré politics some day, beginning with the American Tory exiles in London after the Revolution. These politics are so dreadful because they consist entirely of recriminations, for nothing new happens to émigrés, there is no one to persuade, no followings to be organized, and no offices or measures to be pursued. There is no future, only a past. Exile does nothing for one's character. It is a very desperate condition. We know from the history of nineteenth-century immigrations to America that the suffering of the newcomers was dreadful. Their unhappiness was due less to material deprivation, since many had never known comfort, than to homesickness and loneliness. The German Jews in New York in the 1930s and 1940s were able to form little "tribes," as Arendt called her old friends, from among their fellow exiles and so

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they were not isolated. Only their homesickness, aggravated by worry about friends who did not get out, was overwhelming. It is something that has to be experienced to be understood.

Homelessness, however, has its political dimensions, and one of Arendt's best early essays dealt with statelessness. Her argument, based on her own experience and that of other refugees in France, was that in a world of nation-states, human rights are meaningless apart from citizenship. The only fundamental right of man, therefore, is the right to be the legal citizen of some state. Without that nothing else is possible. This, however, is not a call for an organic community or nationality, but for citizenship as a legal and political entitlement, not an accident of birth. The distinction is theoretically very important, but it was also one of her blind spots. By the time she wrote *The Origins of Totalitarianism* she had made up her mind that nationalism was a thing of the past—it was dead and not to be confused or compared with the living ideologies of the age. This notion, which her Marxist inclinations reinforced, was immune to evidence; nothing could persuade her that nationalism was still a very great force in the present. On this point, I speak from personal experience. As one of her friends, Erich Heller, was to note, when Arendt was wrong she "exploded into wrongness."

Young-Bruehl tells us that Arendt had a hard time organizing the book that made her famous, and indeed *The Origins of Totalitarianism* consists of three detached parts. It is also mistitled since *origins* suggests an historical account of social changes from their first beginnings onward. Like most readers, Young-Bruehl, however, finds Arendt's approach to history confusing. And well she might. Arendt never showed the slightest respect for historians. She called the heirs of Ranke "eunuchs" because of their striving for objectivity. The representation of the past through the chronological arrangement of all the available evidence struck her as trivial. She had no interest in explaining how something came to be, step by step. What she found valuable was "the unpremeditated attentive facing up to and resisting of reality," which was Heidegger's response to *Geschichtlichkeit*. With bits of history, literature, biography, and a lot of personal imagination and speculation, she set out, and in fact managed, to create an enveloping sense of the world of anti-Semites and Jews, and of the imperialists and their victims. This indeed is Nietzschean history, not as piety, political advice, or science, but in the service of the social imagination, if not of "life."

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The last part of the book is not an account of what actually went on in the Nazi and Soviet concentration camps—one need only compare it to any reliable historical work on the subject. What she does offer is quite different. It is an illustration of the post-Nietzschean world of "nothingness." The camps are the places of terror with no exits, where nothing normal remains. They are reality inverted. To outsiders this world may look insane or like the hell of Giotto's *Last Judgement*, but that is obtuse. The camps' world, "inside," proves "that the power of man is greater" than conventional people care to admit. In fact, of course, human power is all there is. We create our own knowable world and every standard in it. For God does not preside over anything. This world, moreover, re-creates itself, for everything in it is superfluous, and omnipotent man creates superfluities to be discarded and repeated, over and over again. Hell remains well stocked. Common sense can never grasp, and utilitarianism is only a barrier to recognition of, this reversal of all values. This is not merely Dante's *Inferno* without God, it is also an echo of Zarathustra, who already talked of men as pebbles to be kicked aside—except there is no hope of any superman now. For the world of terror that omnipotent man has created is also a world of necessity, of "iron" laws of nature and history and with its own "icy logic." Ideology has made and maintains this void in the absence of "Being." Such, then, is our disorder when we must give up the very notion of truth and our search for it. This indeed is "history" as facing and resisting reality. For Arendt the totalitarian world was a philosophical nightmare of which the actuality of the camps was the expression.

If the last section of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was an exercise in post-Nietzschean philosophizing, the book also made a serious contribution to political theory in the tradition of Montesquieu and de Tocqueville. Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism as a new and unique type of rule was a real addition to the theory of regimes. The importance of superfluous populations also goes far to explain genocide. One need only consider the American Indian. For superfluous peoples were for Arendt both a surrealist vision and a perfectly straightforward historical explanation of some imperialist encounters. It ought, finally, to be stressed that although Arendt insisted on the gulf that separated totalitarian from authoritarian regimes, she would not have approved of the current use of that distinction. It would, one suspects, have distressed her to see her work become an

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ideological weapon of any kind, but especially one wielded against the support of human rights abroad. Her own career as a cold warrior came to an end in the sixties. She was always fiercely anti-Soviet, knowing what that regime was since the Moscow Trials, but she could not bear most ex- or anti-Communists. Only those German *former* Communists like her husband, who had quit the party very early, could count on her respect, as Young-Bruehl carefully explains.

Of all the sections of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* the one on the theory of mass society was the least original and the most superficial, as well as the most popular. Its classic exposition had already appeared in Emil Lederer's *The State of the Masses*, to which Arendt failed to acknowledge a very obvious debt. In post-Marxist speculative sociology, the failure of the proletariat to appear and the success of fascism meant that class society was dead and had been replaced by an undifferentiated "mass," which was easily held together by hate ideologies, propaganda, and terror. The nonsociety of these disoriented individuals was the inevitable successor of class society as Marx had seen it. The American spin-offs from this were numerous. The consumer society, McCarthyism, mid-mass conformism, and even the populist tradition in American politics were squeezed into this essentially Marxist vision. For no one could say a good word for the middle class. Mass theory became at most a rather crude weapon in the hands of various local old-left radicals, who wanted to take one last whack at America. As for *The Origins of Totalitarianism*—it remains enormously interesting and must surely become a primary document in the intellectual history of the middle years of this century.

Arendt's next book was the first non-Jewish and the most German of her American writings. By the mid-fifties her *Bildung* had reasserted itself. She had brushed up her Greek and she had picked up the surviving pieces of her German past, including Heidegger. She wrote to her husband that her first visit to Karl Jaspers in Basel in 1949 was "like coming home." She returned to Germany often from then on. Being "back home" revealed some not unexpected layers of thought and feeling. In keeping with the oldest traditions and the purest ideals of German *Bildung* she worshiped ancient Greece. No one ever had a worse case of Athens-worship than Arendt. The passionate longing for that lost culture was the deepest impulse of romantic poetry and of that quest for "spiritual" liberation, especially in a society as unfree as the Germany of Schiller,

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Humboldt, and Heidegger's loved Hölderlin. In addition to this classicism she appears to have been drawn to Roman Catholicism in those years. Perhaps remaining unbaptized or a pariah was a real struggle for her. She was often in the company of her old Catholic friend, Waldemar Gurian, a liberal baptized Jew; lectured for several years in the neo-Thomist atmosphere of the University of Chicago; and published a great many of her essays in *Commonweal* and in Notre Dame's *Review of Politics*. One would like to hear more about her Chicago associations than Young-Bruehl tells us.

In any case, we know that her first introduction to philosophy came from the Catholic theologian Romano Guardini and that she attended many courses on Christian theology, always making sure that there would be no anti-Semitic talk. Her Ph.D. thesis was on Saint Augustine's concept of neighborly love, considered philosophically, not theologically. It was, nevertheless, a study of a Christian thinker who regarded love as an expression of man's relation to God. In *The Human Condition* the medieval Church is seen as the great preserver of classical values, and Jesus as one of the great heroes of the "active" life. Eventually she wrote a cloying and sentimental essay on John XXIII, "The Christian Pope." This, as well as the preoccupations of *The Human Condition* and of some of her subsequent essays, may well have contributed to her remoteness (in the very middle of Manhattan!) from the actual life of American Jewry. Remote may be too feeble a word, for *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is set in a cultural vacuum.

The Human Condition is likely to remain Arendt's most widely admired book. It is very closely modeled on Hegel's *Phenomenology* and its main arguments owe much to his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. This debt is passed over in silence and Hegel is presented only as one of the precursors of Marx's philosophy of history, an enterprise that Arendt thought political theory should abandon, although, in fact, *The Human Condition* itself belongs to that genre. The argument is a "then" and "now" contrast, the ancients against the moderns. In Greek thought and practice, labor, man's natural effort to survive, was despised. Fabrication—the creation of artificial objects out of nature—and action—the realm of human exchanges and of history—were separated from labor and placed on a higher level. At the top of the moral hierarchy was contemplation, man's highest end. This view was adopted by Christian theologians and philosophers, though their contempt for the world was more

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intense. This hierarchy also set apart the lowly "private" sphere of the laboring household from the "public" sphere, where human activity took place. "Making" and "acting" were also kept apart, as they are not today. Indeed "modern man" has turned all this upside down to disastrous effect. "Making" social life is to fabricate utopias. Above all, the dignity of labor has devalued activity, so that private life has now all but eliminated public space and silenced public man. Only artists still create and only scientists act in the present world. The task now of political theory, therefore, is not to return to the old primacy of contemplation, but to put action in its place, so that public life will stand above private labor.

It is not surprising that Heidegger hated this book. It was Arendt's explicit rejection of his "nihilism" and more especially of his search for a pre-Socratic and also radically anti-Christian ground of thinking. It is not irrelevant that Heidegger was a very lapsed Catholic. Not only did Arendt here seem to turn away from the priority of poetry and the need to devise new myths, she had also taken up a philosophical tradition that Heidegger had long since declared bankrupt. And indeed after she had finished *The Human Condition* Arendt came to share the outlook of her other teacher, Karl Jaspers, and so in due course turned to Kant, especially the *Critique of Judgement*, for guidance in her later political reflections.

Arendt's own political dream remained tied to the polis. In spite of what Aristotle tells us, she was never very clear about what went on in that blessed "public space." In fact, we know that there was ferocious fighting between rich and poor and over who would conduct the next interpolis war, and in what manner. These unpleasant facts are rarely mentioned by those advocates of participatory democracy who became her disciples. She herself tended more toward a Kropotkin-type anarchism of which the polislike kibbutz, the primitive Soviets, and the workers' councils of the Hungarian uprising were the historic illustrations. But she also appreciated American democracy, though it cannot be said that she understood it particularly well. She was, among other things, prone to prophecies of early catastrophe. Whenever something unfortunate occurred she thought that the end of the republic was near. (One does not forget Weimar easily.) Her admiration for the work of the men of 1787 was also exaggerated, because she came to think of them as classical models of civic virtue, latter-day Catos. That is how she came especially to regard John Adams, who feared both the "many" and the

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"few," the "masses" and the "elite." Even Jefferson passed muster because he wanted our politics to remain local. All this appeared in *On Revolution*, which compares the American to the French Revolution much to the disadvantage of the latter. Like Mandeville and many other eighteenth-century liberals, Arendt discovered that pity is out of place in politics, and that to cure "misery" is to overstep the bounds of the "public" into the "private," which, she claimed, was what led the Jacobins astray.

The only really interesting thing about this embarrassing book is that it is a new version of Friedrich Gentz's comparison of the two revolutions. Arendt had written an essay on him before she left Germany, and she drew an extremely unflattering picture of him in *Rahel*. He had been one of the several hollow men who had betrayed poor Rahel. If this was Arendt's revenge, one must regret it. Arendt's later articles on American politics read like dutiful efforts to remain a "committed intellectual," a stance she greatly admired, especially among the French. Her best essays were wonderful biographies, most of them on women, especially Rosa Luxemburg and Isak Dinesen.

Many writers love to cover trials, which seem to inspire the best novelists. In our time Rebecca West and Sybille Bedford have been notable courtroom reporters. And so Arendt decided that she too would write up a trial—Eichmann's. She wanted to get a good look at a Nazi murderer and she intended to discuss, as in fact she did, some of the great puzzles raised by the trials of war criminals. How should one assign responsibility for acts committed by public agents, not on their own initiative, but as members of governmental organizations? Who can try such people? These are not minor issues in contemporary political theory. Arendt had nothing very new to say about them in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, where they are discussed in a derivative and amateurish way. Legal theory was not her forte. As for the banality of Eichmann's evil, it was really only a return to a point she and many others have made about the Nazi regime: there was a complete disproportion between its causes and its consequences. To look at any of the defendants at Nuremberg and at the Europe in which they were being tried gave one a far more vivid sense of the distance between them and what they had brought about than did Eichmann in his glass booth in Jerusalem.

What Arendt really did in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, however, was to assert her pariah status in an outburst of self-centered "resistance

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to reality," this time in defiance of her own people. Why, she asked, had the East European Jews not behaved like Homeric heroes? Why had they not resisted the Germans more courageously? Why had they contributed to their own destruction? Why had they left no gallant myth for us? All this in spite of the fact that she knew perfectly well that, while Eastern Jews might have made minor difficulties for the Germans, they never could have averted their doom. Only the Allies could save them. One had to be educated, rich, or at least have connections like Arendt (and my parents) to get out of Europe at all. Only a fraction of the "elite"—and not a large one—could hope to leave Eastern Europe at any time. For one of the happy few, in the comfort of New York and in the pages of the *New Yorker*, studded with ads for luxury goods, to ask those "questions" was shocking. The articles, moreover, displayed an extraordinary ignorance. Arendt generalized wildly about the infinitely complex and diverse communities of Eastern Europe, about whose history and structure she knew exactly nothing. To be sure, there had been class conflicts in those societies, and after the anguish of the Final Solution they flared up with bitterness and violence among the survivors in Israel. These also Arendt subjected to the simplicities of her theory of assimilation. The final truth about who did what in Hungary, and what the various Jewish Councils did and did not do during the Nazi era, may never be fully known, but even Young-Bruehl is less than certain that Arendt knew what she was talking about. Truth was not her object.

The reaction from many American Jews was predictable. That Arendt did not anticipate it and was utterly surprised by their anger only shows how divorced she was from local Jewish society. Indeed, apart from a few New York intellectuals, she did not really know any American Jews and she had long ceased to take part in Zionist organizations. But there was more than ignorance and dissociation in her book. There was no particular reason to publish it in that place and at that time. It probably gave no comfort to anti-Semites, as some charged, but it caused pain and justified rage. She meant to inflict the first and need not have been astonished at the latter. At best one can say that she was consistent, because she had always seen Jewishness as the personal acceptance of a fact, and not as a communal way of living. *Eichmann* was, however, not her only lapse into uncomprehending arrogance. Her obsession with pariah status had three years before *Eichmann* provoked her into scolding those

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black parents who had sent their children into forcibly integrated schools in Little Rock. They ought not to expose their children to its humiliations, she argued, and in any case legal and political rights ought not to be coercively extended into the "social" sphere. Her ignorance of American post-Civil War history, of racism, of constitutional law, and of Southern politics was total. That did not deter her from writing an essay to advise and belabor the blacks in Little Rock. Her essay might, in fact, have been of real use to racists, but fortunately it was published in a radical journal, *Dissent*, which neutralized the mischief. Characteristically she changed her mind about the black parents when Ralph Ellison explained to her that they were not parvenus after all, but were heroically sacrificing their children to the future of black America. This sordid episode is, in some ways, a better illustration than *Eichmann* of the fantasy world into which her private responses had led her.

In spite of all this, the American Jewish establishment *did* overreact. The charge of anti-Semitism cannot hold, even disloyalty is too harsh a judgment. Her idea of what a Jew should be was disastrous, but it began as an honorable reaction to the realities of German-Jewish life. Her American-Jewish critics, even before *Eichmann*, were also too sure that there was only one way to be a good Jew: theirs. There was a disproportion between her awful book and the outbursts that it evoked, the most violent coming neither from Israelis nor Jews of European origin, but from American and English Jews who felt more directly attacked by it. They were certainly far too quick to say "anti-Semite" when they felt affronted. In truth, relations between the German and American Jews had long been simmering. The guilt that many American Jews felt for having done less than they might to help the Europeans played its part; hence their subsequent overidentification with the real victims. There were also very real cultural tensions. The anxieties of Jews in a pluralistic, multi-ethnic, democratic society with fresh memories of the Depression were not those of Jews from unitary, class-ridden, authoritarian societies with fascism to frighten them. Moreover the hope, which Arendt shared, that the conflict between *Ostjuden* and *Yeckes* would go away was realized only with the final disappearance of the German Jews. When they came to America they were uncomfortably unlike any other first generation of Jewish immigrants. They were well educated, had been well off, were rarely observant, and knew no Yiddish. They were strangers to the language and the rituals of everyday life that make American Jews a cohesive community. The two were at different stages of assimilation. The Germans

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often felt repelled by even the most welcoming American Jews, and stuck to each other or to solitude. (I knew a man who went to the zoo constantly, because it seemed more familiar than the rest of the Bronx to him.) Finally, the German Jews often did very well very quickly in America. These newcomers often found it easier to succeed in the professions, in science, and in academic life than their long-suffering American peers. Were these Germans genuine *Jews*, or was their ability to get on in the gentile world not a sign of their innate disloyalty?

Even their attitude to America was at first a puzzle. They did not plan to stay. Only the Final Solution finally convinced them that they had no *Heimat* in Europe. That Arendt did go back and did choose to find her spiritual home there was probably at the very root of her self-inflicted troubles. Nor can her Hellenism have helped her to be more realistic. Rahel's contemporary, Ludwig Börne, né Baruch, began the German practice of contrasting the Hebrews and the Greeks, and it did neither him nor anyone since much good, least of all Nietzsche's heirs. In spite of all this Arendt's detractors were no more tolerant or generous than she was, and they were, after all, in a far stronger position. They were not the last members of a quickly dying culture. American Jewry is a flourishing community, while German-Jewish culture died with Hannah Arendt.

While all this was going on, Arendt continued to be an enormous success as a teacher at several universities. Her firmness appealed to American students starved for authority. They could also see that her *Bildung* had a depth that could sustain her in a way that their education never would or could. Most of all she had a great deal of personal magnetism and her histrionic talents were formidable. No one who ever heard her lecture in her rasping, guttural, East-Prussian, German-accented English can ever forget that voice. She was always a great presence. When she spoke, *all* of her was *there*.

Young-Bruehl has written a full, if not complete, life of Arendt. She evidently admired her, but the reader is not forced into sharing her view, and can come away neither liking nor agreeing with Arendt. That is the sign of an honest work. It is the story of a Jewish life, lived as she thought a Jew should live, for better or worse. At her death only five members of her once large family were alive. And one is moved by the last photograph taken of her shortly before she died. It is the face of an old Jewess, with two thousand years of sorrow on it.

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POEMS

David Lehman

RECENT ACQUISITION

In 1958, when it was finished,
Morris Louis called it "Beth-Gimel,"
That is, the second and third letters of the Hebrew alphabet,
Loss of the original Aleph being the painter's point, perhaps.
(Beth meaning house, it could also mean "House of Gimel.")
It looks like a scarf, made of silk, all brown
Except for thin rainbow stripes (red, blue,
And two shades of yellow) along the sides.

On the other hand, it could be seen
For what it might have been: the back of a head,
Masculine, with a flattop haircut, such as was sported
By the character called Bizzarro in *Superman* comic books.
Gimel seems a good name for him.
The monstrous bulge on the right side could be
An oversized ear, a jutting bone, a nerve that refuses to behave,
Or an excess of chewing tobacco in cheek.
We are in the locker room, with the dirty jokes and socks
Of jocks. But when the pads come off
His shoulders, and we remove him from that region
Where brightly colored butter knives descend from the sky,
See how different he looks and sounds.
Now we can see the long stem of his neck—so taut, so thin—
For the suffering there has been, is, and will be
Overcome! at the cost of weariness and comic nightmares
Of ladders climbed nightly, leading nowhere
Under the sheltering clouds. We hear him sing
A (once) popular song, we see him stand on the narrow ledge
Of a cliff the shape of his own head, a gothic
Mountain disguised as a skyscraper, purely vertical
And impossible to climb, so how did he get there?

Here, untold stories above sea level, he can be
Oblivious to the traffic below, alone at last.

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So the character, though grotesque, retains the ability to arouse
Pathos and humor and sometimes the sublime
Sensation of vertigo, good sleepwalker that he is, heading
Like the fool in the tarot, straight to the edge,
With his dog behind him, his white teeth sunk
In his master's trousers. Whether the accompanying growls are meant
To urge him over or warn him of impending doom,
We cannot say for certain. A case could be made both ways.
Nor can we predict, nor tell if we could,
The outcome of the drama, whether,
And to what end, an unidentifiable force
Will guide him across the feary chasm where
The earth once shuddered open. We must leave him there
Not knowing, in the prison of his eternal moment, looking
Relaxed in the body that has begun to fit him, climbing
Little steps of air, in the damp, unwholesome night.

Daniel Halpern

THE CONTENTS

for Laurie

Remember those subjects, thrown
to the wind
and by the wind thrown back
so that in the night
when you wake
the wind has passed through
and all that's left palpable
in the dark are those subjects,
now thrilled with the arc
they went out on,
a fly released
over a stream on a line
nearly invisible.
Your subjects are returning,

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the midnight population
of your earlier years,
full of content and the avatars
who brought you up.
Now in this night they have gathered,
one body so silent, demanding you
to address them.

Dave Smith

MOSQUITO BITING

Nosing the oiled gravel that gleams like passion
left years back under the yellow caution
light hung across from the cemetery
at Churchland Highway and Emmaus Road,
a colorless and rock-throbbing Chevrolet
stops in the dead center of midnight's glow.

Flipping a dime, the hand in the backlit door
of the Pure Oil Station, Elmer Casteen's,
halts, hovers long enough to take
the quick thrust of a single summer
bite, then spreads the small, dark stain
as the dime rings, its glimmer in my mind all

I need to hear again the laughter of that velvet
Saturday night. Around me something frail
ticks, invisible, relentless, almost
only an idea pulsed out of the darkness
not even good window screens keep out.
Honeysuckle and pine thicken my breathing

and wake me to lie naked in myself, wishing
the clock did not buck from minute to minute,

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the night would go cool, enough to draw
near the one restless beside me.
Heat lightning far off shimmers like hope,
its flashed yellow on me like a deadly pallor.

I turn in my head to that time, endless as youth,
when a girl slipped from my side to stand
between two crossing headlights, an ache
of beauty I saw squat, lift, let go
her brassed water to ring like many
dimes all over the stones of the dead.

Casteen, emptied by age, your business long failed,
do you somewhere still whoop, surprised,
grabbing yourself like an old coach
for joy? The hum of that night
drones in my ear until I see
a moon float on the eyes of a girl

gilded fully against all the hunching hours we did
not think would end. Out there a boy races
home the family car, still swelling
the night with laughs, bad music,
a name softly whining inside him.
It will call, late, just as he lies down.

Where the parents sleep in memory's half-life, it
will float like a face barely speaking,
a roll of light's glimmer, not
summonable or known, leaving us again
awake to slap and claw at ourselves
for the stinging we cannot make go or stay,

until at last, rigid as stones, we rise, stand
midway between night's unpredictable pulse
and the pure deadly revelation of naked
light in our rooms. Lying as still
as I can I listen to each distant squeal.
Somewhere music rasps the moonless words

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that shine on lips not yet beautifully bruised.
They have given themselves to darkness,
to you, Casteen, who put out that
intolerable light, passed through stones
to lie sleepless, hoping to know her name,
as I, now, slap myself and wait, stung.

Aaron Bulman

(against the cold)*

it is the luck of the moon that no one
will walk upon her moonscapes, nor touch her,
not in the summer that came at decade's end,
not even when the dark side was shown to be
the same, all along, as the side already seen;
but this too is luck, like the baying of dogs,
of whom the talmud says, they bay at death,
(someone
 else
 's)
not mine, not mine, not me, not yet.
while shaking our heads no in unison
at the unheard of speeds of our age,
which call into question his other ages:

just as i dance
across from you
and i am unable
to touch in you
so should it be

*This is part of a longer poem called *Last Diaspora*.

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with my enemies
they too unable
to touch in me;
to do me bad

how go his walking distances
to the center of the un
iverse?
o o the intricacies of everydaytime
while watching at decade's end's end.
and dogs, once set to howling, do not stop.
did not stop, you say. did not stop, we refrain.
and the numbers began to come in uncounted.
(in the millions, a newsman says)
in the millions he said, you say.
in the millions he said, we repeat.
altogether and slowly and clearly,
three times, no more no less:
in the millions he said
in the millions he said
in the millions he said
and where once it was crowded but no longer so
we step back the three steps in order to
step forward the three steps to where once
he was when it was crowded . . . we whisper
no longer so no longer so no longer so
o o the intricacies of everydaytime
while watching at decade's end's end.
from chairs to floors. from floors to chairs.
in dimensions once measured that way—
each man his decade of dreams, his,
count them, one two three four cubits . . .
how high were those chairs? how far from the floor?
did your feet . . . could your feet touch the ground?
I once heard feet on a cold ground,
they were running, but never far enough;
where go those walking distances?
can they be run? can they be run
at the unheard of speeds of our age
you, winded at decade's end,

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say for the sayer, you plead of me,
say for the sayer as I've taught you.
(as if the kaddish will never stop, not
 until he blocks up his ears and
 catches his breath . . .)
your do nots become cannot be,
in the way of disbelieving mothers
in the nightmares they've handed down to us
still saying, do not disappoint us son
we've seen enough too much no more
not mine please God not mine no more,
while heads shake no in unison;
it cannot be it cannot be it cannot be
. . . while watching at decade's end's end.
where go your walking distances to
where it is the luck of the sayer to say; to
where it is the luck of the answerer to answer; to
where it is the luck of the listener to listen, but
now unable to say or to listen or to answer, only
to watch while we turn away and then turn back,
away-then-back away-then-back away-then-back
your body swaying back and forth,
your ears stopped up at decade's end,
it cannot be it cannot be it cannot be
from floor to chair and back
I trace your steps

gone

the full debator's length
the stretch a network

of regret; my life,
which has to do with

once
spoken voices

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Michael Naumann

GERMAN IDENTITY AND THE EMERGENCE OF GERMAN NEONATIONALISM

"Undoubtedly, the idea of the nation re-emerges as a mental image and as a will, but also as a center of identification in our political consciousness."

Egon Bahr, 1982*

A common, mutual feeling of alienation has always been a metaphor for the loss or an imagined absence of political liberty in Germany. Coined by Hegel, adopted by Marx, and spread by Marx's philosophically inclined disciples, the word today describes a feeling of imprisonment by omnipotent circumstances of modernity—Heidegger's *Geworfenheit*. Whether people really are "imprisoned" is another matter. It is certainly true, though, that new centralized forms of federal government have turned old-fashioned political organizations into obsolete dinosaurs that neither provide a matrix of political consciousness nor serve successfully as instigators of political actions. And it is in the wake of this crisis of political representation that Germans look for ersatz solutions, for a bridge between a happy private and a felicitous societal existence. If one cannot be a part—let alone free master—of an anonymous political process, one can at least feel part of the nation. Nationalism provides the mortar for a bridge between the "alienated" individual and the surrounding society. Alienation breeds nationalism. In fact, nationalism has accompanied the German experience of modernity.

The German sociologist Plessner once noted in his brilliant essay on the "late German nation" that the nineteenth century's discovery of the instrumental character of rational methodology in society, business, and politics was felt as a "cultural shock"—a loss of liberty during a long industrial process of change—"a process that tore down everything without giving anything in return but the prospects of future power and influence." Germany's historical emergency exits out of the maze of modernity were revolution (1848) and, after its failure, emigration. Yet the easiest justification

*Egon Bahr, as aide to Willy Brandt, was the architect of *Ostpolitik*.

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of the new "alienating" experience of industrialized and centralized political life was nationalism: a glowing embellishment of Germany's republican resignation.

The true achievement of German, Bismarckian nationalism in the nineteenth century was ideological integration; and it was a melancholic achievement. "*Die deutsche Nation*" did not evoke visions of the developing Ruhr valley, of the industrial suburbs of Wuppertal, Hamburg, or Berlin. The idea of the German nation symbolized a peculiar closeness to the ground, to one's father's homeland and its traditional customs. These, of course, were simple images, soothing, blinding to the realities of slums, rural and urban deprivations—the usual concomitants of industrial revolution.

Antimodern values (although certainly not blind to the ecological realities of pollution) are the rage again in West Germany's subculture. The "simple" life, looking after your garden, your *Seele* and *Gefühl*, and a certain antienlightenment attitude* form the matrix for an anti-Western, nationalistic attitude. It has been enforced by some early, loose talk of the Reagan administration about the possibilities of a limited nuclear war in Europe. The "peace movement," a coalition of left-wing splinter groups, church-going young people, the "green" ecologists, and simply worried citizens, cannot stomach the psychology of nuclear deterrence. West Germany's peaceful existence since 1945 is not seen in the light of a continued success of the Western alliance. The stationing of ever more nuclear devices in Germany (in fact, there are fewer deployed than two decades ago) is experienced as a direct threat to Germany's existence.**

Rational arguments—that a "demilitarized West Germany" will not become less desirable to the Soviet Union than it might be now; that Germans cannot expect America to provide the nuclear umbrella without sharing some of the risks—do not reach minds trained for simple answers. Such "answers" are offered by the

*Strangely enough, Auschwitz is understood as a consequence of unchecked enlightenment in the guise of totalitarian bureaucracy—an idea adapted from Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectics of Enlightenment*.

**One of the organizers of the great peace rally in Bonn during Ronald Reagan's visit, Petra Kelly, thinks that she has a "patriotic duty" to fulfill by preventing the deployment of Pershing-II missiles and cruise missiles, a deployment that was once called for by Helmut Schmidt to balance the threat of Russian SS-20s.

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emotional gratification of nationalism. "To go it alone"—an idea well known to American isolationists—has its attractions to many Germans as well.

Seen from the outside, the idea of "Germany" has always been too large. Even in its Bismarckian, compact version, a united Germany was considered too awesome a hegemonial power by its neighbors. Today, prospects of reunification still evoke memories of German imperialism amongst those European nations that suffered most from it. German foreign policy is still measured against the crimes committed during twelve years of National Socialism under Adolf Hitler. If there is one natural law in European foreign policy, it seems to center on the future curbing of still more German growth, power, and nationalism. Seen from Paris, London, or Rome, the German question was settled in 1945; Konrad Adenauer's option for a Western alliance provided a definite answer to the German question in Moscow: the territorial status of the postwar period was not to be doubted.

Only Germany's politicians are required to see their country in less stable historical perspectives; the official political culture of the Federal Republic rests on a *pro tem* basis. The *Grundgesetz* (literally, the founding law) of 1949 decrees, "The whole German people are called upon to complete Germany's unity and freedom in free self-determination." And according to the last article of the *Grundgesetz*, its validity is lost on the day the Germans vote for a real constitution, a *Verfassung*, in free elections. In other words, as long as communism and Soviet domination prevail over East Germany, the political institutions of the *whole* German nation remain provisional. And yet, there is nothing provisional about the wall in Berlin (nor, in fact, about the fate of those who tried to cross it and failed); two German armies are not provisional and neither are two German economies, two German governments, and, in many ways, two German languages. The idea of *one* German nation within one territorial boundary, the *Nationalstaat*, suffered heavily from the normative force of facts.

Yet, it did not evaporate completely, although the constitutional call for a reunification of Germany within its territorial realm of 1937 (even the weather map on TV stuck to those borders, including Königsberg-Kaliningrad in East Prussia) lost its appeal to the West Germans during the enriching experiences of the economic miracle.

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The Federal Republic happily concentrated on its new affluence; and while the German Democratic Republic clung to its official ideology of reunification ("Germans at one table!"), its citizens practiced the art of escaping by all means toward the West. Those were the days of Konrad Adenauer, a faithful Catholic born in Cologne, where the Napoleonic experience had left numerous cultural traces—unlike in Prussia, where the memory was alive that the city had once been a spiritual center of Europe. Russia's plains, Adenauer once half-jokingly remarked, begin east of the city of Braunschweig. His politics, complete and "unconditional" integration of the Federal Republic in the Western economic and defensive alliance, bear testimony to his geographical and "tribal" whim. East of Braunschweig lies "Mitteldeutschland," Central Germany.

National aspirations did not go down well with the voters in the fifties and sixties, as the SPD, which had trusted in a national urge for reunification, learned the hard way. The idea of the German nation led a more or less theatrical existence, being exploited to garner the votes of twelve million refugees from the East.

East Germany's unrelenting repression in the fifties and sixties, backed by the Red Army, appalled and embittered many West Germans who assumed that this specific form of socialism was possible only in Prussia. The new East German army slipped into the old uniforms of the Wehrmacht. While West Germans satisfied their emotional political needs in a genuine and partly successful quest for (West) European unity, East Germany evolved into a state run by *petit bourgeois* for *petit bourgeois*. It was able to build a fairly functional economy against all *realsozialistische* odds. So, after three decades of socialism, East Germany developed a somewhat forced, albeit real, national pride and self-esteem, symbolized by its athletes at the Olympic Games: the girls slightly bearded, the men sheer monuments to the miracle of chemistry—victorious, nonetheless.

The East German nationalism is official, its paraphernalia traditional and outmoded—goose step included. To what degree it penetrates the hearts and minds of the people is hard to say. Yet there is no doubt that self-esteem and a certain pride, if not patriotism, have taken hold of the East Germans. They are no longer *Brüder und Schwestern*, brothers and sisters, to use a shelved phrase of West German national "togetherness."

And West Germany? About two years ago, pollsters and political scientists discovered a feebly articulated, yet demographically

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tangible, neonationalism in the Federal Republic. I shall call this nationalism *neo* to differentiate it from the official doctrine of German racial, cultural, political, and military superiority, which collapsed in 1945. Imbecile expressions of traditional, right-wing nationalism seem to be of minute importance within the wide spectrum of West Germany's political culture—as embarrassing as they sometimes are (i.e., in their widely reported anti-Semitic, xenophobic manifestations).

German neonationalism is of greater interest once it is understood as an emotional, symbolic expression of a profound crisis of political representation. West Germany is drifting. The visitor will quickly perceive a certain affluent aimlessness, a loss of normative coherence, a suicidal, restless melancholy in the arts, specifically in literature: the nation, never known for its *Heiterkeit* (serenity), is in the midst of another spell of gloom. German voters are shifting their allegiances faster than ever before; political parties, single-issue groups, *Bürgerinitiativen* appear and disappear at ever shorter intervals, and old political ties seem to crack (as the coalition government in Bonn demonstrates at least once a week). Political scientists pour out tracts analyzing a "capitalist crisis of legitimacy" (thus helping it on). And the NATO alliance, though supported by the great majority of the people, has turned into the villain of the *Weltanschauung* on the left. Rarely before has that famous German question, *Wer sind wir?*, Who are we?, been asked more fervently. Germany has embarked on one of its famous, if not notorious, voyages into the interior. And there it finds—*die Nation.**

Here are some of the treasures discovered during that introspective adventure. In a letter to *Der Spiegel*, Professor Gollwitzer, famous Berlin theologian, falls back into a post-Versailles accent: "No German can accept the unconditional subjection of our people's interest under foreign interests." The author Gerd Fuchs writes in *konkret*, a magazine once secretly subsidized by East Germany: "These people have raped our honor; a whole nation has been seduced. . . ." Gollwitzer and Fuchs speak about German-American relations—as does another author, Piwitt, who complains about "this cultivation of Americanism, this Yankee-talk." These

*It should be noted here that the *New York Times* correspondent in Bonn, John Vinocur (now in Paris), was one of the first journalists in Germany to point out this trend—a fact that did not endear him to German officialdom.

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are utterances of old German nationalism, aggressive fringe-group attitudes from the left. How important and influential they are remains to be seen.

On a serious political level, the idea of a German nation received numerous impulses in the course of *Ostpolitik*. Three years ago, Helmut Schmidt mentioned the possibility that one day two German states might exist under "one roof, in one house," a metaphor the chancellor grew fond of. If this implied the notion of a political confederation between East and West Germany, it was well hidden. It was clear, however, that the idea of the "roof" was but an architectural symbol of the "nation." According to Horst Ehmke, the leading intellectual of the SPD, there is a dominant self-understanding of East and West Germans that "despite the partition there is a German nation." A look at the map clearly shows that Ehmke does not share the enlightened notion of nationhood; it was Rousseau, after all, who claimed that only sovereignty turned people into a nation. Nationalism as a doctrine implies that the only legitimate political order rests on the demands of nationhood, demands that call for the immersion of individuals, families, groups, and classes in a larger national identity—an identity traditionally connected to a territorial state (not *two* states).

The troublesome fact that there are two Germanies—troublesome to those politicians who, like the new chancellor, Helmut Kohl, adhere to the concept of *one* nation—has complicated the discussion about German national identity. Günter Gaus, Bonn's "ambassador" to East Berlin for many years, thinks that many Germans have simply turned East Germany into a metaphor for communism: "Faced with the alternative 'ideology or nation', most of us opted for 'ideology'. " It is time, however, he claims, that Bonn conduct politics under "German priorities. And it may be unpleasant," he recently wrote in *Die Zeit*, "to realize that we've got to solve our mutual problems with the German Democratic Republic. Detours via the Big Brothers are usually more expensive." The cryptic meaning of Gaus's national theorizing is simple. During his tenure in East Berlin he had discovered many remnants of German "identity." His hope for a future, semiautonomous intra-German policy seems to rest on a mutual feeling of national *Deutschtum* that shall carry the day over "ideology," i.e., anticommunism.

Egon Bahr was the architect of *Ostpolitik* while counselor to Chancellor Willy Brandt. He agrees with Günter Gaus. And

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although he does not believe in a reunified German nation unless the political and ideological schism of Europe evaporates, he firmly states that the "Germans have a right to pursue their national interests just as the Americans and the British." The only trouble with such a truism lies in the fact that there are two Germanies with wildly diverging interests; and each can—and does—easily lay claim to national sanctity.

So while politicians are busy developing a national symbolism adaptable to a rather complicated political reality, "nationalism" is fulfilling a completely different role on a lower level of German politics. Jürgen Habermas was one of the first to discover some years ago that "the national question [in Germany] becomes an equivalent for dispositions that aim against the central state." According to this theory, people in the German regions felt misrepresented by a more and more effective centralized government. An "official" legislative and judicial process that places nuclear power plants in the middle of a cherished landscape and a government that cuts autobahns through ancient forests is experienced as the bureaucratic enemy *par excellence*. Unable and unwilling to cope with the problem on an institutional basis (political reforms in the last twenty years have greatly diminished chances for participation; more than 100,000 local politicians have lost, if not their jobs, at least their hobbies), opposition against big government and big bureaucracy tends to focus on traditional emotional issues out of the symbolic treasure chest of German nationalism. Like elsewhere, the most dramatic German mass movements have always been organized around *Gefühls*-issues; and the ecological *movimento* of the seventies was no different. Nuclear power plants, problems of air and water pollution were seen as modern, typical manifestations of technical and civilizational contradictions. Most of all, though, they were experienced as threats against regional and national identities: ecology in West Germany had (and still has) a romantic, patriotic undercurrent that swept conservative farmers, Protestant believers, and socialist students into bizarre grand coalitions.

The sixties had brought dogmatic theorizing in the name of *Wissenschaft* and Karl Marx—from Kant to Hegel and onwards to Marx, Lenin, and up to Lukács: The bookshops in the university towns were filled to the rim with the "classics"; the theoretical refinement of the German left was astounding, its solidarity with every international cause that fit the framework of its ideology was

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sincere, although somewhat transient. Twenty years later, Iring Fetscher, who had done much to reintroduce young Marx into the realm of German political consciousness, looks back; the "quest for national identity," he says, is a sound reaction against years of socialist internationalism and cosmopolitan consumerism. "The desire to represent a somewhat national peculiarity is obvious," he adds. Fetscher finds "the desire acceptable to open oneself to German identity. Because we have repressed far too long who we are and where we came from." Yet, if the term "identity" makes any sense, the motives and psychological mechanisms of the "repression" Iring Fetscher has in mind must be part of that identity. At any rate, the national resurgence provides relief from the cerebral demands of Marxian theorizing; more and more young Germans prefer a stroll through the garden of feelings.

They are walking on old pathways. Between November 1979 and March 1980, the federal government collected demographic material through the Heidelberg pollster Sinus; 6,968 Germans, picked at random, were asked about their national and political inclinations. The research aimed at a picture of potential right-wing attitudes in West Germany. Though there was a stringent academic discussion on the methodology of the research, the results give a clear indication of a national change of mood.

Asked how they judge their friends, 44 percent of the Germans assume that they have "national attitudes" (11 percent "yes indeed"; 31 percent "partly correct"). Asked whether they miss an "*echte Volksgemeinschaft*, neither capitalism nor communism," 53 percent either missed this nebulous people's community "very much" (19 percent) or at least "every now and then" (34 percent). Small wonder, then, that 29 percent believe "national forces" in the Federal Republic are suppressed (6 percent "yes indeed"; 23 percent "sometimes"); and almost the same number, 28 percent, believe in a "sell-out of German interests" (6 percent "that's correct"; 22 percent "partly correct"). Here is the reservoir for German neutralism.

Xenophobia and racism are classic elements of German nationalism. It came as a shock to the pollster to learn that 39 percent of the Germans believe it advisable to keep clean not only the environment, but also the race (12 percent "correct"; 27 percent "partly correct"). And frightening continuities are suggested by the fact that 21 percent of the population think that it is either "correct" (5 per-

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cent) or "partly correct to do away with degenerated life for the sake of the nation's health and unity."

According to the researchers, at least 20 percent of the German population would choose some sort of "right-wing" nationalism, if only they had a chance. Yet, it would be wrong to blame this intellectual, nationalistic deficiency solely on the right fringe. There are, after all, a few indications that German neonationalism also caters to a number of leftist ideologies. As 41 percent of the Germans prefer the "old German way of life," they simultaneously air their antimaterialistic, anticapitalistic prejudices (which, in turn, closely connect to anti-Americanism).

National prejudices correlate to a dominant feeling of unhappiness, of "alienation" as in the nineteenth century; 68 percent of the population share the feeling that "everything changes so quickly nowadays that one doesn't know where to turn to." If one looks at the 78 percent of the German population who think that the word *Vaterland* is "very important" (27 percent) or at least "important" (51 percent), one will also find that 71 percent of the Germans who share this belief are discontent with their life. They suffer from *Zukunftsangst, Angst* of the future.

This feeling of insecurity, of an indescribable *grand malaise*, reflects, on an emotional level, the official unhappiness of Bonn: harassed by inflation, huge deficits, sinking productivity, unemployment, and enormous regional, eco-political changes, Germany's politicians—at least those in power—usually feel betrayed by circumstances.

Simple answers to the complexities of modernity have been the main attraction of German nationalism in the past. Their application to reality brought about the downfall of the German nation, at least in its nineteenth-century version. And although the world will see this nation never again, its cultural ideas linger beautifully, its political symbols survive, and its dark ideological attractions continue to deceive: Germany's eternal utopia.

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Simon Karlinsky

NABOKOV'S LECTURES ON RUSSIAN LITERATURE

According to a story known at departments of Russian literature on many American campuses, Vladimir Nabokov was at one time considered for a professorial appointment by a major East Coast institution of higher learning. During the discussion of his candidacy, a distinguished Russian-born scholar objected that one does not hire a major Russian writer to teach Russian literature, just as one does not invite an elephant to teach a course on elephants. Both the objection and the example seem capricious. Noted artists, poets, and composers are often hired by universities as teachers on the strength of their proven achievements. As for elephants, an articulate and communicative one, if such could be found, would be a definite asset to a course devoted to the study of its species. And articulate and communicative was precisely what Vladimir Nabokov was in his capacities as critic, literary translator, and eventually teacher and literary scholar.

A younger contemporary of Boris Pasternak, Osip Mandelstam, and Marina Tsvetaeva, Nabokov was exposed to the same symbolist and postsymbolist literary currents of the last prerevolutionary decade that formed the outlook of these three great poets. Like them, Nabokov rejected the utilitarian and ideological approach to literature that dominated Russian culture at the end of the nineteenth century, and he also shared their respect for craftsmanship and their interest in the verbal texture of literary works. Some of his other attitudes, however, such as his contempt for the neoclassicism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in general, and for most Russian writers who antedated Pushkin in particular, have more in common with nineteenth-century utilitarianism than with Russian modernism of the early twentieth century.

It was in the non-Russian surroundings of Cambridge University that Vladimir Nabokov settled down to a systematic study of his native literature, prompted, as he tells us in both the

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This article is an abridged version of the introductory essay commissioned for *Nabokov's Lectures on Russian Literature*. At the request of Mrs. Véra Nabokov, it did not appear in the book.

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English and the Russian versions of his autobiography, by his fear of forgetting or contaminating the cultural heritage that connected him to the native land he no longer hoped to see. The extent to which Russian literature permeated the memories of his stay at Cambridge is shown in the description of his activities as a goalkeeper at soccer matches, which in the Russian autobiography (but not in the English one) is studded with references to Chekhov, Turgenev, and Pushkin.

Quite early, Nabokov began to hybridize his fiction and poetry with his literary studies. His three verse plays of 1923–24 and his comedy *The Event* (1938) are rich pastiches of themes and textual reminiscences from nineteenth-century Russian authors. *The Gift* (1938) is both a novel and a compressed literary history of nineteenth-century Russia. During Nabokov's American period, this trend was to find its culmination in *Pale Fire* and *Ada*, both of which put the methods of literary research and scholarship in the service of telling the novel's plot. Just as the narrative in *Pale Fire* took the form of annotations to a long poem, the four-volume edition of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* offered a quirky and idiosyncratic translation of this novel in verse as a pretext for a study of Pushkin's language and style couched in the form of footnotes.

The recently published lectures on Russian literature were prepared for Nabokov's courses in Russian and in comparative literature taught at Wellesley College and Cornell University. Those were the years (1941–58) when he wrote *Bend Sinister*, *Lolita*, and *Pnin* and also did a number of literary translations and studies. Both as critic and as teacher of literature, Nabokov was not interested in establishing literary developments as an historical continuum. Literary schools and influences were of no importance as far as he was concerned. References to secondary sources are minimal in his lectures and the choice of these sources seems haphazard, as when he supports a point on Dostoevsky by citing the famed anarchist Prince Peter Kropotkin's *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature*, a compendium of nineteenth-century clichés and *idées reçues*, or draws on Alexander Roskin's propagandistic book for children, *From the Banks of the Volga*, for biographical information on Gorky. What Nabokov cared for was the individual writer and the individual work. In his survey course, the students were given just enough historical background on a given period to enable them to concentrate on a close study of a particular masterpiece stemming from that period.

Nabokov's view of literature was formed, as already men-

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tioned, during that brief interval of about a quarter of a century when Russian culture temporarily freed itself from the utilitarianism that dominated it in the second half of the nineteenth century and that, in the words of the foremost prerevolutionary theoretician of Russian Marxism, George Plekhanov, saw the task of the critic or teacher of literature as "translating a literary work from the language of art into the language of the social sciences." It was a tradition of disregarding the quality of literary language, of mistrusting originality and brilliance, of ignoring the form of literary works, of ignoring everything except the writer's "politically correct" attitude to issues of contemporary relevance. Anton Chekhov rebelled against this in the 1890s, when he wrote that "the novelist interested in art should pass over everything that is of only temporary significance." Chekhov's view, heretical and scandalous at the end of the nineteenth century, became the norm for most Russian writers active during the first two decades of this century.

As Nabokov eloquently explains in his lecture on "Russian Writers, Censors, and Readers," the utilitarian dictatorship over literature assumed a much more dire aspect in Soviet times than it ever had before the revolution, combining the worst features of tsarist censorship with the prescriptive demands of nineteenth-century radical dissent. His research in the 1930s for the detailed biography of one of the originators of radical-utilitarian control over literature, Nikolai Chernyshevsky, which forms the fourth chapter of *The Gift*, must have further convinced Nabokov that the only way to understand the essence of a work of literary art is "for literary criticism to discard its sociological, religious, philosophical and other textbooks, which only help mediocrity to admire itself.

In his interviews, autobiographies, and letters to Edmund Wilson, Nabokov had many interesting things to say about the twentieth-century Russian writers whose work he valued, such as Ivan Bunin, Alexander Blok, Andrei Bely, and a few others. But his lectures, except for a brief section on Maxim Gorky (much of it paraphrased from Roskin's book), deal with four great nineteenth-century figures: Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov (the Gogol lecture is a reprint of a portion of Nabokov's 1944 book *Nikolai Gogol*). Ivan Turgenev did not, to Nabokov's mind, belong in the same league with Gogol, Tolstoy, or Chekhov. He was for him "not a great writer, though a very pleasant one." Nabokov found errors in Turgenev's much-admired nature descriptions and faulted

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his novels for their lack of action and the compulsive tidiness of his concluding chapters, where the ultimate fate of all characters is usually methodically summarized. But Nabokov also admired what he called Turgenev's "perfectly modulated, well-oiled prose," the langorous structure of his sentences, which in the lectures are compared to "a lizard sun-charmed on a wall" and in *The Gift* were likened to the graceful loping of a hare. With the aid of lengthy quotations and a diagram of the characters' peregrinations, Nabokov uncovered for his students the mechanism of his favorite Turgenev novel, *Fathers and Sons*, and shared with them his conception of its inner workings.

Leo Tolstoy was for Nabokov beyond doubt the greatest of all Russian prose fiction writers. I believe I once heard him say that *Anna Karenina* was the greatest novel ever written, period. Nabokov loved *War and Peace* as well, but he rated it slightly lower than *Anna Karenina* because in his first big novel Tolstoy had not yet learned to integrate his theoretical digressions about society and history into the main narrative and resorted to interrupting the flow of his novel by separate philosophical chapters. Not unexpectedly, Nabokov's favorite Tolstoy novel is given the most extensive treatment in the entire lecture series. The Tolstoy section comprises not only the material intended for classroom use, but apparently the preliminary drafts for an unrealized annotated edition of *Anna Karenina* as well.

Like innumerable other readers of *Anna Karenina*, Nabokov was fascinated by Tolstoy's genius for conveying the very texture of his protagonists' lives. As a practicing novelist of great technical brilliance, Nabokov was able to unravel the underpinnings of Tolstoy's illusionist magic. The secret, as revealed by Nabokov, is Tolstoy's handling of the narrative time span in ways that the reader can sense and recognize as believable. The illusion of the actual flow of time is achieved despite the presence in the novel of two distinct and unsynchronized clocks. One clock is valid for the Kitty-Lyovin plot, and it only occasionally coincides with the clock that marks the main action of the novel.

By identifying the various historical events mentioned in Tolstoy's text, Nabokov carefully timed the action of *Anna Karenina* and supplied the historical dates for its various fictional events (something that he did also for *Eugene Onegin*). Significantly, while making his students aware of the richness of Tolstoy's characterizations and the perfection of the novel's structure and pointing out the

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one architectural flaw he did discern in it (Vronsky's suicide attempt, awkward both psychologically and structurally), Nabokov avoided all mention of the fact that *Anna Karenina* is a complex social and political novel. Similarly, his discussion of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* passes over in silence that work's historical and topical dimensions, while at the same time doing full justice to its permanently valid social satire. It was not that he was not aware of these aspects of the two works; but pointing them out would have contradicted his entire method of teaching.

The lecture on Dostoevsky is the big surprise of the series. The surprise is not Nabokov's well-known aversion to him, which often puzzled his interviewers and readers. Perceived in the West as an inexplicable aberration, his negative view of Dostoevsky's achievement was in fact shared by some of his more illustrious predecessors in the Russian literary tradition. Tolstoy, for example, when discussing *The Brothers Karamazov*, wrote of his revulsion for the book's "lack of artistic quality, its frivolity, posturings and wrong-headed attitude toward important matters." Anton Chekhov was bored by Dostoevsky's novels and thought them long-winded and pretentious. Marina Tsvetaeva regarded Dostoevsky as altogether unnecessary. Just as Nabokov thought *The Double* (an early novel heavily influenced by Gogol) Dostoevsky's finest work, Tsvetaeva made an exception for another early work, the story "White Nights," because it was by a Dostoevsky who was "still one third Gogol and one third Dickens," two writers she loved.

Given Nabokov's outlook on life, art, and politics, his recoil from everything Dostoevsky stands for was inevitable. What *is* unexpected is Nabokov's thorough familiarity with Dostoevsky's entire *oeuvre* and the numerous insights he brings to his discussion of the novels. The vividly Nabokovian reading of *The Idiot*, the discussion of the clash between the farcical chapter headings in *The Brothers Karamazov* and the actual content of those chapters, and the insistence on the theatrical source of Dostoevsky's novelistic techniques—on Dostoevsky as a potential playwright trapped inside the novelist—can be valued by Dostoevsky scholars who may otherwise totally disagree with Nabokov's view of him.

The occasional appreciative statements, however grudgingly made, are particularly fascinating: *The Brothers Karamazov* as a "riotous whodunit in slow motion"; the plot of *The Idiot* "ably developed, with many ingenious devices to prolong the suspense" (even if some

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of these devices appear to Nabokov "like blows of a club instead of the light touch of an artist's fingers"); and especially the description of the climactic comical scene at Mrs. Stavrogin's in *The Possessed* as "grand booming nonsense with flashes of genius illuminating the whole gloomy and mad farce."

Nabokov recognized that the story he calls "Memoirs From Under the Floor" (its title is usually rendered into English, erroneously and misleadingly, as *Notes from Underground*) is the quintessential work of Dostoevsky, a concentration of his "themes and formulas and intonations." Because he decided to limit his interest in it to "a study in style," his usual methodological and structural approach to literature for once proved inadequate. "Memoirs From Under the Floor" cannot, as D.S. Mirsky has pointed out, "be regarded as imaginative literature pure and simple" because "its place is among the great mystical revelations of mankind," a dimension Nabokov refused to acknowledge.

Historically, the work was Dostoevsky's refutation of nineteenth-century positivism and rationalism as expressed in Chernyshevsky's atrocious but influential novel *What is to be Done?*. Nabokov did his own refuting of that novel and of the entire complex of ideas it represented in the Chernyshevsky chapter of *The Gift*. On the surface of it, this would make the Dostoevsky of "Memoirs From Under the Floor" Nabokov's comrade-in-arms, but the drastically different approaches of the two writers to all the issues in question renders such a paradoxical alliance unthinkable.

Yet, the parallelism of their treatment of Chernyshevsky's novel and the flashes of sympathy now and then discernible in the Dostoevsky lecture point to the still unsolved riddle of the affinity of certain Nabokov novels to Dostoevsky: the parodistic variations on *Crime and Punishment* in *Despair*; the similarity of the narrator of *The Eye* to the one in "Memoirs From Under the Floor"; and the respective treatments of pedophilia—as the ultimate, deliberately willed crime in several of Dostoevsky's novels and, more plausibly, as an unfortunate and involuntary sexual orientation in Nabokov's *Lolita*.

Nabokov may have disliked Dostoevsky and venerated Tolstoy, but the Russian writer he loved was Anton Chekhov. His deep affection for Chekhov ("it is *his* works that I would take on a trip to another planet," as Nabokov put it so memorably in "Anniversary Notes") puzzles only those who do not look deeply enough into the sources of the two writers' artistic visions. Among the things that

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drew Nabokov to Chekhov was their shared aversion to literary conventions and stereotypes of all kinds; the roots of their respective artistic methods in biological sciences, with the concomitant habit of precise observation and recording of reality; and their very similar political outlook.

Nabokov's political creed, enunciated in his 1964 *Playboy* interview, "Freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom of art," is in its essence identical with Chekhov's personal credo stated in his frequently quoted 1888 letter to Alexei Pleshcheyev. Trite and self-evident as these basic freedoms may appear in today's Western democracies, how many Russian writers, from Pushkin to Solzhenitsyn (let alone Soviet writers) have ever regarded them as basic priorities? Nabokov may get a few details wrong in his biographical sketch of Chekhov, but his loving dissections of two of Chekhov's great stories, "The Lady with the Little Dog" and "In the Ravine," testify to his deep understanding and appreciation of the writer he once called "my predecessor."

The American novelist Edmund White has pointed out in his perceptive essay on Nabokov, "The Esthetics of Bliss," that appreciation of Nabokov did not come easy to American readers because "Americans have seldom felt at ease with literary art. They have wanted it to be uplifting and 'activist.' They have expected books to be thermometers, taking the temperature of the *Zeitgeist*—or at least battle reports from the front lines of a beleaguered ego." In teaching young Americans about the succession of great writers of whom he was the ultimate heir, in showing them how to read literature as literature, Vladimir Nabokov was also pointing out exactly where the insistence on message and uplift over art have led one of the great literatures of modern times.

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Roger Copeland

POSTMODERN DANCE AND THE REPUDIATION OF PRIMITIVISM

In his well-known essay, "Poet and Dancer Before Diaghilev," Frank Kermode attempts to account for the rhapsodic enthusiasm with which so many poets and intellectuals greeted the pioneer modern dancer Loie Fuller, and the first Parisian performances of the Ballet Russe. He attributes this love affair to a fascination with the "primitive" element in both modern dance and the early work of Diaghilev. Kermode wrote in 1961:

> The peculiar prestige of dancing over the past seventy or eighty years has, I think, much to do with the notion that it somehow represents art in an undissociated and unspecialized form—a notion made explicit by Yeats and hinted at by Valéry. The notion is essentially primitivist; it depends upon the assumption that mind and body, form and matter, image and discourse have undergone a process of dissociation, which it is the business of art momentarily to mend. Consequently dancing is credited with a sacred priority over the other arts. . . . There is no fundamental disagreement that dance is the most primitive, non-discursive art, offering a pre-scientific image of life, an intuitive truth. Thus it is the emblem of the Romantic image. Dance belongs to a period before the self and the world were divided. . . .

Throughout the twentieth century, this infatuation with primitivism has resulted in the idealizing and sentimentalizing of ritualistic dances performed by nonliterate cultures. It is easy enough to understand the essentially "therapeutic" appeal of such dancing for a culture (our own) that has come to lament the neurotic character of civilization, the supposed triumph of intellect over feeling, the "repressive" nature of language, and all the other assorted discontents that urbanization and secularization give rise to.

But it is considerably more difficult to account for the "residual" primitivism that is so often attributed by dance writers to even the most secular and fully theatricalized forms of dance. Consider,

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for example, this astonishing statement by the twentieth-century dance historian Curt Sachs:

> Strange as it may sound—since the Stone Age, the dance has taken on as little in the way of new forms as of new content. The history of the creative dance takes place in pre-history.

Strange indeed; but stranger still is this comment from one of America's foremost balletomanes, Edwin Denby:

> Today's professionals of ballet are artists, they are virtuosos, craftsmen specialized for life. But as one watches them, just when they are at their best, history seems to vanish. The quality of character that makes a dancer seems the same as three or four thousand years ago. The nature of the pleasure they give by their genius as dancers does not seem to have changed much since Minoan times.

Clearly, for these writers, part of the appeal of contemporary theatrical dance derives from its latently primitive character. Dance is conceived of as the last remaining link between the hypercivilized present and the prehistoric past. But ironically, beginning with the work of Merce Cunningham, the most advanced, self-consciously innovative choreography of the last thirty years has systematically repudiated any and all forms of primitivism. This is most apparent in the work of Cunningham's younger successors, the so-called post-modern choreographers such as Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Kenneth King, and David Gordon.

Before examining the way this repudiation has come about, I'd like to explain more precisely what I mean by *primitivism* as it applies to dance. In one sense, this primitivism is yet another manifestation of that variety of anti-intellectualism peculiar to intellectuals: the impulse that Kermode discusses, the desire to heal the "dissociation of sensibility," to transcend the very principles of duality and negation. The villain (in time-honored romantic fashion) is excessive self-consciousness (in Blake's words, "the negation is the Spectre, the Reasoning Power in Man:/This is a false Body. . ."). Thus dance, the art of the true body, becomes the chosen vehicle of transcendence. But I don't want to create the impression that the cult of primitivism surrounding dance was invented wholly by intellectuals and then projected onto an unsuspecting art form. As we'll soon see, primitivist notions are the animating principles behind

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one of the great choreographic traditions of this century, the modern dance.

The Quest for Wholeness

The key concept in all primitivist thinking and writing about dance is wholeness, the idea that dance can somehow help restore a sense of unity or connection otherwise alien to the modern world. Geoffrey Gorer speaks for many of his fellow anthropologists when he writes (with obvious admiration and envy) about the function of dance in West African tribal communities:

> The dance is undoubtedly the chief African art; all the other arts—music, singing, sculpture, textiles, and lesser handicrafts have been diverted to serve and enhance the dance. . . .The dance is the chief medium which gives meaning to their lives and unites them with the forces which people their universe.

Elsewhere in the same article, he observes that "the first and most fundamental point to be made about African dancing is that it always involves the whole body."

Wagner, invoking the unity of primitive ritual as the basis of his *Gesamtkunstwerk*, ascribes a comparably central role to dance (at least in theory):

> The arts of Dance, of Tone, and Poetry thus call themselves the three primeval sisters. . . . By their nature they are inseparable . . . for in the dance, which is the very cadence of Art itself, they are so wonderous closely interlaced with one another.

The poets and intellectuals that Frank Kermode discusses, the ones who genuflected at the feet of Loie Fuller and the early Ballet Russe, were all smitten with this Wagnerian dream of synthesis. Loie Fuller, enveloped in billowing silks and bathed in brightly colored light, appeared to become "one" with her materials. "She blends with rapidly changing colours which vary their limelit phantasmagoria. . . ." wrote Mallarmé. Yeats was also a great fan of hers; and it may well have been the memory of Fuller that inspired him to ask (in "Among School Children"), "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" And Diaghilev, of course, was renowned primarily for his entrepreneurial savvy, his ability to persuade the leading composers and painters of the day—Stravinsky, Satie,

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Picasso, Matisse, Derain—to create music, decor, and costumes expressly for the Ballet Russe. His success in these collaborative ventures led Camille Mauclair to announce that the early Ballet Russe extravaganzas had out-Wagnered Wagner. Here is a representative excerpt from his review of *Scheherazade*:

> This dream-like spectacle, beside which the Wagnerian synthesis itself is but a clumsy barbarism, this spectacle where all sensations correspond and weave together by their continual interlacing . . . the collaboration of decor, lighting, costumes, and mime establishes unknown relationships in the mind.

Another manifestation of this hunger for wholeness is the way much primitivist writing subtly, but intentionally, blurs the distinction between ritualistic and theatrical dance, suggesting that the separation between spectator and spectacle (even in the most secular, estheticized circumstances) is somehow less distinct in the art of dance than in the other theatrical arts. Dance thereby preserves that "participation mystique" which Levy-Bruhl attributed to the primitive mind. John Martin, for example, believes that "the inherent contagion of bodily movement . . . makes the onlooker feel sympathetically in his own musculature the exertions he sees in somebody else's musculature." Even Paul Valéry, who normally places such a high premium on "disinterestedness" and esthetic distance, argues that "part of our pleasure as spectators (of dance) consists in feeling ourselves possessed by the rhythms so that we ourselves are virtually dancing." And quintessentially, in his book *The Dance of Life* Havelock Ellis suggests that:

> Even if we are not ourselves dancers, but merely the spectators of the dance, we are still, according to that Lippsian doctrine of *Einfuhlung* or "empathy" . . . feeling ourselves in the dancer who is manifesting and expressing the latent impulses of our own being.

This argument—that the act of watching dance is invariably a form of virtual participation—reveals the primitivist's distrust of "objectivity" (and of the detachment that makes it possible). According to Mary Wigman, the chief pioneer of modern dance in Germany:

> The primary concern of the creative dancer should be that his

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> audience not think of the dance objectively, or look at it from an aloof and intellectual point of view,—in other words, separate itself from the very life of the dancer's experiences;—the audience should allow the dance to affect it emotionally and without reserve. It should allow the rhythm, the music, the very movement of the dancer's body to stimulate the same feeling and emotional mood within itself, as this mood and emotional condition has stimulated the dancer.

This denial of objectivity characterizes not only the audience's experience of the dance, but the choreographer's as well. To the early pioneers of modern dance, it would have been unthinkable not to perform in their own works—a practice that denied them the opportunity ever to stand fully "outside" the finished dance.

Nothing reveals quite so much about the primitivists as their attitude toward language. This attitude was probably expressed most concisely by Loie Fuller when she wrote, "Motion and not language is truthful." Movement, which is thought to derive from a deeper, more elemental domain of the self than language, presumably circumvents the machinations of consciousness in a way that language cannot. This led Graham to declare that "movement does not lie."

According to this argument, words—at the very least—come *between* us and experience. As Bergson notes in *Time and Free Will*:

> When I partake of a dish that is supposed to be exquisite, the name which it bears suggestive of the approval given to it comes between my sensation and consciousness; I may believe that the flavor pleases me when a slight effort of attention would prove the contrary.

Perhaps the most serious "charge" leveled by the primitivists against language is that it is guilty of having introduced the principle of duality into human experience. To use language correctly is to recognize that words are *not* the things they signify. Language bears an arbitrary, culturally mediated relationship to the information it conveys; but the gestures of dance are thought of as somehow inseparable from the sensations they evoke. Dance is thus celebrated as the very image of Edenic unity, the last remaining vestige of what Boehme called *"die sensualische Sprache,"* or sensual speech (which Rilke later envisioned as "natural speech by means of the body").

Writing about Martha Graham, Arlene Croce says:

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> Conceivably, Martha Graham is so great a poet of the theatre because she has the power of exorcising the word. . . . What Graham is proposing to us is wordlessness itself, a beneficient [sic] wordlessness not merely as a prerequisite of the medium but as a modern psychological condition.

Graham, she seems to be suggesting, is not only nonverbal, but *antiverbal.**

This hostility toward language is inextricably bound up with the primitivists' attitude toward time and history. George Steiner, drawing on the theories of Benjamin Lee Whorf, has suggested that the very concept of history, of linear time, is dependent upon language. Without different tenses, he argues, we would be unable to project ourselves out of the ahistorical, perpetual present. According to the primitivists, dance—the preemminently antiverbal art form—evolves in prehistory; but even contemporary theatrical dance is supposed to provide us with the sensation of escaping from history, of entering some timeless present of perpetual newness. As we've already seen, Denby suggests that while watching dance, "history seems to vanish." According to Isadora Duncan, "If we seek the

*This is not to imply that Graham and the other pioneers of modern dance never incorporated spoken language into their work, especially their more "theatrical" dance-dramas. But the only language they permitted was almost invariably poetry (or prose poetry), not discursive prose. In other words, they took a more tolerant view of the language that attempted to overcome its own dissociated condition by establishing new correspondences between sound and sense or by revealing what John Crowe Ransom has called "the world's body." Graham's interpolation of Emily Dickinson's poetry in *Letter to the World* and Doris Humphrey's use of quotations from Lorca in *Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias* come immediately to mind. The most successful—and celebrated—attempt to unite dance and words was probably Jean Erdman's *The Coach With Six Insides*. The verbal text for this dance-drama was adapted from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake,* where words are in a perpetual state of metaphorical displacement, infinitely resonant. Still, from the modern dancer's point of view, no verbal language—no matter how "bodily," no matter how resonant—can ever compete with the language of the body. In *Letter to the World,* for instance, Graham shows us two halves of Emily Dickinson: "The One Who Speaks" and "The One Who Dances." The verbal half is designed to reveal the poet's public persona, while the silent Dickinson ("The One Who Dances") purports to reveal the "inner" person.

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real source of the dance, if we go to nature, we find that the dance of the future is the dance of the past, the dance of eternity, and has been and always will be the same."

In *The World's Illusion*, Jacob Wasserman tells us that "to dance means to be new, to be fresh at every moment, as though one had just issued from the hands of God." We may be tempted to dismiss this sort of talk as mere poetic fancy; but in a very real and practical sense, dance *is* an art without a history. Only a handful of works choreographed prior to the twentieth century survive today. This lamentable state of affairs can of course be attributed in large part to the absence of an adequate notational system prior to this century. But one of the reasons that notation has developed so much more slowly for dance than, say, for music is that the choreographers and performers themselves have often been opposed to preservation. Isadora Duncan steadfastly refused to permit her dances to be filmed, preferring to confine their existence to the fleeting moment in which they were performed. And Martha Graham has been notoriously protective of the roles she created, often refusing to "hand them down" to capable successors, and thereby affirming both the ephemerality of the dance and the (apparently) inseparable bond between "the dancer and the dance."

André Levinson once said of Isadora Duncan, "She was the product of a race that had no past." If dancing is indeed the least "historical" of the arts, then it makes perfect sense that it should flourish—as it does—in the least historical of countries, the United States. Afflicted with what sometimes appears to be a permanent loss of memory, Americans are among the world's most avid dancegoers.

Despite the tenacious persistence of these ideas in the dance world—perhaps *because* of it—the most progressive choreography of the past three decades (the work of Merce Cunningham and his younger, "postmodern" successors) has attempted to purge itself of primitivist ideas and practices. In fact, the repudiation of primitivism constitutes a virtual definition of postmodern dance. The work of choreographers such as Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, David Gordon, Kenneth King, Lucinda Childs, and the early Twyla Tharp shares a number of common characteristics: a "pedestrian," unstylized movement vocabulary; an indifference—if not an outright hostility—toward technique and virtuosity; an unwillingness to conceal

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physical effort; a strong "conceptual" tendency; and, often, a heavy reliance on words. But as I hope to show, the real significance of these separate innovations is that they all serve the goal of repudiating primitivism.

Separating the Elements

The first direct assault on the primitivist heritage came, ironically enough, from a former Graham dancer, Merce Cunningham; and his break with Graham constitutes one of the most complete and far-reaching renunciations in the history of dance. Graham wrote: "What is the beginning? Perhaps when we seek wholeness, when we embark on the journey toward wholeness." Cunningham takes a very different attitude toward wholeness. In fact, his epoch-making decision to "dissociate" sound, movement, and decor—creating works in which these three elements simply coexist independently of one another—undermined the very foundation of primitivist wholeness.

It's especially revealing to compare Cunningham's attitude toward "unity" with Diaghilev's. Like Diaghilev, Cunningham managed to attract as collaborators the most progressive composers and painters of his era. (Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Robert Morris, Frank Stella, John Cage, Milton Babbitt, Earle Brown, and Christian Wolfe have all collaborated, at one time or another, with Cunningham.) But whereas Diaghilev's collaborations were Wagnerian in spirit, Cunningham's were Brechtian. In fact, Cunningham achieved that anti-Wagnerian "separation of the elements" that Brecht advocated so forcefully.

In the following statement from 1930, Brecht pits himself explicitly against Wagner, and he uncannily seems to anticipate Cunningham.

> So long as the expression *"Gesamtkunstwerk"* (or "integrated work of art") means that the integration is a muddle, so long as the arts are supposed to be "fused" together, the various elements will all be equally degraded, and each will act as a mere "feed" to the rest. The process of fusion extends to the spectator who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art. Witchcraft of this sort must of course be fought against. Whatever is intended to

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> produce hypnosis, is likely to induce sordid intoxication, or creates fog, has got to be given up. *Words, music, and setting must become more independent of one another.*

So, in a very real sense, Cunningham is to Diaghilev as Brecht was to Wagner. Cunningham's rejection of wholeness or unity is tantamount—at least etymologically—to a rejection of "holiness" (the assumption that dance *can*, momentarily, mend the dissociation of sensibility, a condition that is presumably a consequence of our biblical "fallenness.") If it appears that I'm burdening Cunningham with too heavy a load of metaphysical baggage, consider this statement by Simone Forti, a dancer whose "organic" inclinations were frustrated by Cunningham's dissociative techniques. In her *Handbook in Motion* she writes:

> I started going to the Merce Cunningham school. I remember watching my teachers, and feeling that I couldn't even perceive what they were doing, let alone do it. . . . An important element of the movement seemed to be the arbitrary isolation of the different parts of the body. I recall a statement I made in exasperation one day in the studio. I said that Merce Cunningham was a master of adult, isolated articulation. And that the thing I had to offer was still very close to the holistic, and generalized response of infants.*

*Anyone familiar with the standard accounts of postmodern dance will recognize that I'm defining the movement much more narrowly—and I hope more rigorously—than is customary. Considerable confusion may result from the fact that choreographers like Forti—along with Anna Halprin and Deborah Hay—are routinely identified as postmodernists simply because they employ a pedestrian, unvirtuosic movement vocabulary. But their goal—unlike that of Rainer, Childs, et al.—is to lessen the distance between performer and spectator, in effect to democratize the art of dance by limiting their choreographic vocabulary to movement that can be executed by untrained performers. (This ambition is reminiscent of the anti-aristocratic, anti-hierarchical, anti-balletic impulse that first brought modern dance into being.) Much of Hay's and Halprin's work is unabashedly "therapeutic," a participatory ritual for spectators and performers alike. The problem then with purely descriptive, empirical definitions of postmodern dance is that they often fail to distinguish properly between these two camps. The differences between Forti and Rainer, for example, are almost as great as the differences between Graham and Rainer.

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Actually, the "isolation" of one part of the body from another in Cunningham's choreography mirrors the more fundamental isolation of sound, movement, and decor. Both are aspects of his assault on primitivist unity.

Cunningham's separation of the elements also undermines the primitivist emphasis on virtual participation, that tendency to blur the distinction between ritualistic and theatrical dance. Note that for Brecht, the ultimate goal of this separation (the *Verfremdungs-Effekt*) is to preserve the spectator's perceptual freedom. (The Wagnerian spectator, by contrast, "gets thrown into the melting pot too," rendering him or her perceptually "passive.")

Thus it's particularly significant that in a number of key Cunningham works the setting forms a physical barrier of sorts that comes between the spectator and the spectacle. For *Tread* (1970), Bruce Nauman designed a row of standing fans assembled on the downstage curtain line directly between the audience and the dance. Jasper Johns's movable plastic partitions for *Walkaround Time* (1968) served a similar, mediating function. Much the same is true of Frank Stella's mobile "color fields" designed for Cunningham's *Scramble* (1967).

These physical barriers are symbolic of Cunningham's desire to preserve the viewer's perceptual freedom and objectivity, eliminating any vestige of the "participation mystique." Of course, most Cunningham dances don't employ such explicit visual obstacles, but even those that don't still manage, in a variety of ways, to mediate and complicate the viewer's experience of the dance.

One of Cunningham's most influential works was a dance from 1965 called *How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run.* The choreography was accompanied by John Cage reading from his books *Silence* and *A Year From Monday.* Perhaps because words are already "dissociated" from the things they signify, the language in this work both symbolized and contributed to the desired separation of the elements.

As I've already suggested, one of the distinguishing features of postmodern choreography is its eagerness to utilize the resources of language. One might go so far as to say that when Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Kenneth King, and David Gordon incorporate verbal commentaries into their performances they are in a sense "institutionalizing" the principle of dissociation that Cunningham pioneered. (Remember what Bergson said about language coming between us and our experience.) Rather than yearning nostalgically

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for some primitive, preverbal, undissociated form of communication, they seem reconciled to the fact that human beings are, by definition, language-bearing animals (and this fact inevitably alters the way we both create and perceive dances).

Yvonne Rainer, probably the most articulate of the postmodern choreographers, clearly parts ways with her modernist predecessor Loie Fuller when she admits, "I have a longstanding infatuation with language, a not easily assailed conviction that it, above all else, offers a key to clarity." No advocate of primitive wholeness, Rainer has also confessed, "I love . . . the duality of the body: the body as a moving, thinking, decision and action-making entity and the body as an inert entity, object-like." The postmodern choreographers seem to recognize the wisdom of Brecht's tragic conclusion that "the union of organs is the only union and it can never bridge the gap of speech."

In *Elements of Semiology,* Roland Barthes argued that "it appears increasingly more difficult to conceive a system of images and objects whose signifieds can exist independently of language." Kenneth King, the most loquacious of the postmodern choreographers, echoes Barthes's basic premise when he says, "I know dance is nondiscursive, but we process our perceptions linguistically. Language is bound up with how we see in ways we're not even aware of. And often, when I do a movement, words come to mind."

I don't know that the choreographers in question would go as far as Barthes and argue that all systems of meaning are ultimately subdivisions of language (thereby reversing de Saussure's belief that language is but one of many possible semiotic systems). But I do think most would agree that the sort of *Verfremdungs-Effekt* so necessary to their art would not be possible in a preliterate society.

The chief difference, then, between postmodern dance and the forms that preceded it is not merely the fact that language is often employed in performance (although to be sure, in the late sixties and early seventies the work of choreographers like Rainer, Trisha Brown, and Kenneth King sometimes contained more talking than moving). More important is the "linguistic" state of mind in which these dances are created and perceived. William James once complained that "verbality has stepped into the place of vision." The postmodernists seem to accept this fact, uncomplainingly.

This reconciliation with the "fact" of language also brings with it an altered attitude toward time and history. In Trisha Brown's

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recent performances of *Accumulation* (1971) *With Talking* (1973) *Plus Watermotor* (1978), language functions so as to prevent the viewer from experiencing the dance as a perpetually re-created present. Brown's verbal narration consists of two alternating but otherwise chronological stories. In order to establish the proper narrative context for each fragment, we have to remember precisely where her storytelling left off prior to the interruption. By forcing us to concentrate on an earlier moment while watching the dance unfold in time, Brown prevents us from lavishing all our attention on the fleeting present. We might say that our relationship to the dance has been "historicized."

This leads us to another essential distinction between modern and postmodern dance. The pre-Cunningham moderns prided themselves on having broken completely with history and tradition. Rather than utilizing the inherited and impersonal movement vocabulary of the academic ballet, the early moderns tried to work entirely from within their own bodies, giving form to their own subjective ways of moving. Doris Humphrey spoke of "moving from the inside out."

But many of the postmodern choreographers exhibit what Eliot called "the historical sense"; they readily acknowledge that they have been profoundly influenced in positive ways by other choreographers. Rather than deceiving themselves into believing that it's possible to be wholly original (or simply to work entirely from within the self) at this late date in the twentieth century, many postmodern choreographers proceed from a consciousness of the past. Senta Driver, whose work is rich in allusions to dance history, defends this practice by claiming:

> I can't start naive. Some people can. People like Kei Takei, and I think, Martha Graham in the beginning worked just out of what they believed was necessary. But I can't go back to 1930. I know too much about what happened after. I am an inheritor.

At the end of the spoken text for Twyla Tharp's *The Bix Pieces* (1971), the narrator asks, "Can anything be new, original, private? October 9th. Today I thought I'd write a dance to the 'Goldberg Variations,' just because it's already been done."

David Gordon, who is also fond of "quoting" older dances, says:

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> I think I am a reinventor. I don't think there is anything left to invent. I think there are only new combinations of things. And a new way of looking at something and a new way of showing somebody else to look at something, and that's a kind of reinvention.

Dance As An Art Object

Gordon's ideas about reinvention bear a striking resemblance to Marcel Duchamp's concept of the "unassisted readymade." Unlike the pioneers of modern dance, the postmodernists didn't invent a new movement vocabulary; often they simply transplanted what Yvonne Rainer called "found movements" into an "art context" (where, like found objects and readymades, these "pedestrian" movements were involuntarily stripped of their worldly function and "estheticized"). Thus—according to this argument—the context (rather than the content) determines whether or not the perceptual object is a work of art. (As Allan Kaprow once put it, "The framework tells you what it is: a cow in a concert hall is a musician, a cow in a barn is a cow.")

It's often said that this sort of relativism plays havoc with the art-historical values represented by the museum; but ironically, just the reverse is true. The idea of the readymade, the found object or movement—indeed, the "art context" itself—is possible *only* in the age of the museum (which, as Malraux has demonstrated, is a quintessentially contemporary phenomenon). The museum, in other words, can be defined as a space in which objects (many of which once served some sort of function) are estranged from their original environments and relocated in an "art context." Subsequently, their sole "function" is to be looked at. Duchamp's great achievement was to suggest that the museum is really a state of mind, that we "museumize" his readymades when we learn to look at them in a disinterested, nonfunctional way. (This state of mind may be facilitated by the museum, but, theoretically, it can be achieved anywhere.)

Traditionally, it was assumed that the art object imposed the proper "esthetic attitude" (involuntarily) upon the perceiver. Duchamp—and many of the postmodern choreographers—place the burden of achieving this attitude more squarely on the viewer. In Lucinda Child's *Street Dance* (1965), for example, the audience was

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lined up by a window of Robert Rauschenberg's loft and encouraged to look down at the unrehearsed reality of the street. A taped commentary read:

> To see this dance the observer must stand by the window at the south end of the loft and look across the street toward the south side of Broadway onto the sidewalk extending between 11th and 12th streets. I am concerned with the area between the Bon Vivant Delicacies Store and Surplus Materials of Norbert and Hausknect. I am not concerned with either of these buildings specifically but I am concerned with the area between.

The tape then provided an excruciatingly detailed description of the objects—signs, store merchandise, etc.—contained within the verbal "frame." Two performers alternately mingled with passersby or positioned themselves so as to focus the audience's attention on the objects described in the commentary.

By making the perceiver preeminent (or at least coequal with the object of perception), postmodern dance breaks decisively with the primitivist tendency to exalt the experience of the participant. Indeed, the primitivists, as we've seen, confuse theatrical and ritualistic dance; and this has the effect of turning perception into a mode of participation (a virtual definition of Levy-Bruhl's "participation mystique"). In fact, when the primitivists argue that dance is not only the oldest of the arts, but *older* than the arts—that birds and bees also "dance"—they deny altogether the significance of the perceiver.

The primitivists tend to ignore the fact that our word *theatrical* is derived from the Greek word *theatron*, or "seeing place." Ritual, by contrast, is not a "thing seen" but rather a *dromenon*—a thing done. Ideally, in the sacred space of ritual, there are no seats for spectators. Jane Harrison, writing about the transformation from ritual to theatre in Greece, says:

> We have seen that the orchestra, with its dancing chorus, stands for ritual, for the state in which all were worshippers, all joined in a rite of practical intent. We further saw that the theatron, the place for the spectators stood for art. In the orchestra all is life and dancing, the marble seats are the very symbol of rest, aloofness from action, contemplation. The seats for the spectators grow and grow in importance till at last they absorb, as it were, the whole spirit, and give their name theatron, to the whole structure; action is swallowed up in contemplation.

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Or, as Brecht reminds us, "Theatre may be said to derive from ritual; but that is only to say that it becomes theatre once the two have parted."

The museum is the truest *theatron*. (One of the first lessons children learn in the museum is that they are in a place for looking, not touching.) Both literally and figuratively, postmodern dance can be thought of as "the museumization of dance." Figuratively, because it is made possible only by the perceptual conditions that the museum brings into being. Literally, because so much postmodern dance has been financed by and performed in museums.

In a discerning, early article about the nonparticipatory nature of postmodern dance, which he refers to, significantly, as "objective" dance, Michael Kirby spoke of

> a new psychic relationship between the spectator and the work. It must be experienced with a state of mind that has not previously been called for in dance, making it unrewarding and frustrating to those who must empathize and project themselves into the work. But it is a state of mind that has been necessary for half a century when looking at certain paintings and sculpture, explaining why objective dance has developed in close contact with the world of painting and sculpture and why it seems to be appreciated primarily by those who are involved with those arts. Whether or not a wider and larger audience ever senses its importance in performance, the steps that it has already made are significant indications of a change in the mind and consciousness of man.

It would be almost impossible to overestimate the similarities between post-Cunningham dance and the work of contemporary painters and sculptors. Both place a high premium on detachment and objectivity, on *seeing* rather than feeling. Clement Greenberg has argued that one of the chief characteristics of modernist painting is its emphasis on

> purely optical experience as against optical experience modified or revised by tactile associations. . . . Where the Old Masters created an illusion of space into which one could imagine oneself walking, the illusion created by a modernist is one into which one can look, can travel through only with the eye.

This pure "opticality" results in a rigorous anti-illusionism

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(most obviously, in the case of painting, we find an affirmation of the two dimensionality of the canvas; in the case of dance, we find postmodern choreographers calling attention to "real time," expenditure of energy, actual weight, etc.). When Yvonne Rainer insists that "it is important to distinguish between real energy and what I shall call apparent energy," she is parting ways with Susanne Langer's influential primitivist idea that

> the dance is an appearance, if you like, an apparition. It springs from what the dancers do, yet it is something else. In watching a dance you do not see what is physically before you—people running around or twisting their bodies; what you see is a display of interacting forces. . . . But these powers, these forces that seem to operate in the dance, are not the physical forces of the dancer's muscles which actually cause the movements taking place. The forces we seem to perceive most directly and convincingly are created for our perception; and they exist only for it.

Rainer wants us to be analytically aware of the exact expenditure of energy and the precise physical dimensions of those running, twisting bodies, rather than awed by the "invisible forces" that seem to animate them. It's true, of course, that many of the early modern dances did try to conjure up some sort of illusory presence. André Levinson noted of Isadora Duncan, for example, that, "the figurative strength of her gesture is such that the audience can see the sacrificial flowers and vessels in her hands." Postmodern dance eliminates this sort of illusion by purging optical experience of any tactile dimension.

Of course, contemporary art is often about "thinking" as well as about seeing. Cézanne once said, "In the museum, the painter learns to think." Malraux argued that in the world of the museum, our approach to art is simultaneously historicized and intellectualized. Duchamp's innovations, as I've already suggested, are possible only in the age of the museum. By redefining art as a way of looking at and thinking about the world, he profoundly altered our conception of what it means to "make" a work of art. At least in the case of the readymades, all physical craft and manual labor is eliminated; art becomes an exercise of the intelligence, pure and simple.

Despite the wildly extravagant claims that have been made on Duchamp's behalf, it can be argued that he was motivated primarily by a deep-seated inferiority complex deriving from the fact that his

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chosen medium, painting, is, by definition, *nonverbal*. He especially hated the expression *"bête comme un peintre"*—"stupid as a painter." In a remarkable burst of candor, Duchamp once said, "The painter was considered stupid, but the poet and writer were intelligent. I wanted to be intelligent." Defending the conceptual nature of his work, Duchamp confessed, "I was interested in ideas not merely in visual products. I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind. . . . This is the direction in which art should turn: to an intellectual expression rather than to an animal expression."

The choreographer's dilemma is analogous, but even more pronounced. Traditionally, when intellectuals have expressed interest in dance, they have done so for anti-intellectual reasons. Mallarmé praises the "illiterate ballerina." Her empty-headedness is essential to his symbolist theory of dance. In Valéry's dialogue, *Dance and the Soul*, a ballerina says to the philosopher watching her, "To me belongs the consciousness of my obedient muscles; to you the ideas which the figures made by my body must give." As in Kleist's essay on the marionette theater, the more unselfconscious the dancer—the more her consciousness is limited to her *muscles obéissants*—the closer she comes to a state of grace. More recently, Edwin Denby has written, "Dancing is physical motion. It doesn't involve words at all. And so it is an error to suppose that dance intelligence is the same as other sorts of intelligence which involve, on the contrary, words only and no physical movement whatever."

Thus it makes perfect sense that a generation of unprecedentedly articulate and well-educated choreographers, temperamentally attracted to the cool, cerebral qualities of the contemporary art world, would set out to repudiate the heritage of primitivism. This was especially true of the women—Rainer, Lucinda Childs, Trisha Brown—who were eager (for implicitly feminist reasons) to demonstrate that they possessed minds as well as bodies. (One of Rainer's best-known works was titled *The Mind Is a Muscle.*)

The Limits of Dance

But the story of postmodern dance isn't quite that simple. It's one thing for Duchamp to expunge "animal expression" from an inanimate art like painting, quite another to purge it from the bodily art of dance. Whether or not dance can ever fully transcend its primitive origins in an effort to align itself with the theories and practices of the contemporary art world remains to be seen.

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The art world's intensified sense of historical consciousness demands that the processes of making and viewing art become ever more complex, further and further removed from their primitive origins. The most ambitious presentation of this linear, progressive, and evolutionary view of art history is Suzi Gablik's book *Progress in Art*. She argues that "stylistic change reflects varying modes of cognitive-logical capacity, suggesting that the history of art may be seen as an evolution in certain kinds of thought processes." The evolution she traces is from prelogical or mystical mentalities—marked by a blurring of the distinction between subject and object—toward more detached, scientific, and objective modes of thought. "It is only in the art of our own time," she writes, "that the logical mechanisms of intelligence have come to their fullest maturity in the sense of becoming entirely separated from perceptual content. . . ." This requires that the artwork be dematerialized, that it exist essentially as a mental construct, as pure information.

Can dance achieve a comparable degree of evolutionary complexity? Rudolf Arnheim, commenting on the modern dancer's tendency to initiate movements from the torso, once asked:

> Does this mean then, that in the dance the conception of man is reduced to a biologically lower, precerebral stage? The dancer seems to be faced with the dilemma that functionally the highest, specifically human powers of the nervous system control the organism from the head, while the visible structure of the body suggests as the center an area that typically produces non-reflective action, such as in fear, sex, or the lazy stretching of the muscles.

Of course, primitivists exalt dance for precisely these reasons. But Cunningham and the postmodernists have attempted to reverse this evolutionary mandate. Cunningham's dances demand an unprecedented degree of alertness and mental agility (from those who perceive them as well as from those who perform them). Carolyn Brown, for many years a leading member of his company, has commented that Cunningham technique is "designed to develop flexibility in the mind as well as in the body." Is it purely coincidental that one essential aspect of Cunningham's break with Graham and modern dance was his reaffirmation of balletic *verticality* (in contrast to the floor-hugging heaviness of the early moderns)?

In a remarkable meditation on the evolutionary significance of upright posture, the psychologist Erwin Strauss speaks of "the gaze

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of upright posture," which he defines as the ability "to look at things straight ahead and withstand their thrust." This is a very apt description of the perceptual conditions that prevail during a Cunningham performance. The Cunningham dancer must concentrate so as not to be affected by the sound that accompanies his or her movement, and Cunningham's audience must also remain objectively detached.

If Cunningham rejects what Arnheim calls the "biologically lower, precerebral" image of man in modern dance, then so do Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, the painters who have collaborated most often with Cunningham as designers of decor and costumes. Rauschenberg and Johns are the two painters usually credited with having done the most to repudiate the neoprimitivism of the abstract expressionists, substituting a more objective and impersonal mode of image making.

Abstract expressionism is distinctive for its physicality. Paint is applied to canvas with the full physical force of the body (in Pollock's case, the painter literally dances). Johns and Rauschenberg, inspired by the example of Duchamp, rejected the direct, unmediated physicality of abstract expressionism. This repudiation of the "bodilyness" of action painting culminated eventually in the "dematerialization of the art object," the reduction of the art experience to pure, disembodied "information." If dance is to follow in this direction, it does so at the risk of its very identity. The same of course can be said of painting and sculpture, but the renunciation of physicality by dancers seems—if only symbolically—even more perverse.

Kenneth King's work of the early seventies exemplifies the extremity (and perhaps the folly) of the postmodern dancer's dilemma. Kenneth King, by the way, is a supremely talented dancer with a swimmingly sensuous style, but for a period of several years, in the late sixties and early seventies, a dance concert by King was likely to consist of him *reading*. As early as 1966, in his *SuperLecture,* he declared, "I am an anti-body." That same year King unveiled a work called *Praxiomatics (The Practice Room),* his clearest statement about the evolutionary dilemma of dance as an art form.

Praxiomatics unfolds as an evolutionary journey from body to mind in which gesture and action give way to language and thought. Whirling, trance-inducing movements are gradually replaced by a stream of verbiage while King unveils an odd looking device called "The Telaxic Synapsulator." Billed as the first "metamachine," the

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synapsulator provides a metaphorical vision of omniscient consciousness totally free of the limitations normally imposed upon it by the body and nature. The image that eventually emerges is that of a mind that never sleeps, an eye that never blinks; a single consciousness expanded to global proportions, perceiving everything and forgetting nothing—in short, a Faustian yearning for conscious awareness that places us as far as possible from the natural world. And King seems to imply that this can be achieved only by transcending the limitations of the body. In effect, King is posing the same question that Valéry examined in *Monsieur Teste*: "Is it possible for man to be all mind?" In his introduction to the English edition of *M. Teste*, Jackson Matthews says of Valéry's character, "He is impossible because . . . consciousness cannot entirely consume being and still continue to exist. It depends on being."

Yvonne Rainer's choreographic career is emblematic in this regard; in fact, it can serve as a microcosm for the postmodern movement as a whole. Looking back on her first experience as a performer in the early sixties, Rainer has written:

> My first intense feeling of being alive was in performance. . . . It was like an epiphany of beauty and power that I have rarely experienced since . . . an intense feeling of being in the moment. It was the first time I had experienced myself as a whole person. There was no part of my consciousness that was anywhere else. . . . In 1961 [performing] was the most urgent thing I could do.

But this ecstatic high, achieved by surrendering her detachment and objectivity, was short-lived. She soon came to the following conclusion, which put her hopelessly, but rather heroically, at odds with the nature of her own medium:

> I remember thinking that dance was at a disadvantage in relation to sculpture in that the spectator could spend as much time as he required to examine a sculpture, walk around it and so forth—but a dance movement—because it happened in time, vanished as soon as it was executed. So in a solo called "The Bells" I repeated the same seven movements for eight minutes . . . in a sense allowing the spectator to "walk around it."

By 1965, she had adopted a no-frills puritanism summed up in this most austere of manifestos:

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> No to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make believe . . . no to involvement of performer and spectator . . . no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer . . . no to moving or being moved.

In the early 1970s, Rainer began to make films; and in a subsequent interview with Jonas Mekas, she described the satisfaction that came from being "totally outside of what I was making." Perhaps inevitably, Rainer abandoned live performance for filmmaking soon thereafter.

I believe there is a lesson to be learned here: What began for many postmodern choreographers as a repudiation of primitivism ended up as a repudiation of dance. Rainer at least was honest enough to admit that she had stopped producing dances. That, of course, was not always the case for many of her colleagues. As the composer Steve Reich once quipped, "For a long time during the 1960s, one would go to the dance concert where no one danced, followed by the party where everyone danced."

Coming in
PARTISAN REVIEW

- Roger Shattuck on the 1935 Paris Writers' Congress
- Fiction by Sergei Dovlatov, Yuz Aleshkovsky, and Joseph McElroy
- Elisabeth Young-Bruehl on writing biographies
- Glenway Wescott on Marianne Moore and other poets
- Eugene Goodheart on V.S. Naipaul
- Sandra Gilbert on Rider Haggard
- Dan Jacobson on English migratory workers

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Robert S. Wistrich

ISRAELI LETTER

The orgy of denunciation that has greeted Israel's actions during the recent Lebanese war, and in particular the concerted campaign to brand Zionism as a new type of Nazism, confronts Jews everywhere with a difficult challenge. The accusations are not in themselves novel—indeed, for many years Soviet and Arab anti-Zionist propaganda has sought to stigmatize the Israelis (and those who identify with them) as "heirs to Hitler"—but never before have they obtained such a sympathetic hearing in the Western media. There is no doubt that this campaign has been politically motivated and that it is part of a persistent, remorseless strategy by the enemies of Israel to undermine the legitimacy of the Jewish state, its moral basis, and the support it still enjoys among Jews and non-Jews alike. The campaign would not have enjoyed such resonance, however, were it not for the more long-term shift that has been taking place in perceptions of Israel and the Jewish people by the outside world. If one is to combat the new anti-Zionism effectively, it is imperative to understand the deeper reasons for this shift and the extent to which one can hope to bring about a fairer and more sympathetic attitude toward the *raison d'être* of the Jewish state. In particular, it is important to focus our attention on the uses and abuses of the Holocaust trauma, not only by the enemies of Israel, but also, at times, by its supporters.

The Lebanese war, it must be admitted, has seriously eroded the image of the Jew as an underdog or persecuted victim, an image that reached its peak in the aftermath of the Holocaust but began to disintegrate after Israel's lightning military victory of 1967. In the eyes of the world David has now become Goliath, the oppressed Jew has become the oppressor of Palestinians, the paradigmatic victims of history have become ruthless victors. As a result, contemporary anti-Semitism centers on the theme of Jewish arrogance, and hatred of Israel expresses itself in the name of the "wretched of the earth," the humble, the suffering, and the vanquished. But the new anti-Semitism is still sufficiently embarrassed by the term *Jew,* with its emotive historical associations of Holocaust and mass murder, to avoid its use where possible. Zionism, especially in its current incarnation, has in this sense been a godsend, for it makes possible a

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sense of self-satisfied innocence among those enemies of Israel who claim only to be against imperialism, racism, oppression, etc. That this anti-Zionism is nothing but an alibi is apparent when one looks at the indiscriminate terrorist attacks against Jewish synagogues and other targets in Paris, Brussels, Antwerp, Vienna, Milan, Rome, and other European cities—a murderous violence against defenseless Jews unprecedented since World War II. This terrorist nihilism threatens the very fabric of the Western democracies more than it does Israel itself and is the inevitable price that the West will continue to pay as long as it pursues its politics of appeasement of the Arab world. It seems to me that, in fighting such forms of anti-Zionism (which is a life-and-death interest for the democracies as well as for Israel and the Diaspora), not enough has been done to expose the fact that terrorism is a *universal* threat for which Israel merely serves as a convenient pretext. The fashionable anti-Zionism currently trumpeted by the Western media, which subliminally legitimizes terrorism, is in effect no less of a destabilizing, antidemocratic, and corrupting factor than was the anti-Semitism-for-export of the Third Reich in the 1930s and 1940s. In the long term the only beneficiaries of this vicious campaign can be the enemies of the West—the Soviet Union, the Islamic fundamentalists, and the radical forces of the Arab and Third worlds.

Apart from the issue of terrorism and the struggle for world opinion, there is no doubt that the Holocaust, more than any other past event, has become a political card, though one that in recent years has begun to rebound against Israel and Diaspora Jewry. From the standpoint of Israel's enemies and of anti-Semites everywhere, the mass murder of European Jewry and the backlash of sympathy it created after 1945 has always constituted an intense irritant to their objectives, conferring a kind of maddening immunity from criticism or attack on the objects of their hatred. For Israel's own leaders it provided, if not the *raison d'être* of the Jewish state, at least a major argument in favor of Zionism and a source of support (much of it admittedly guilt ridden) from Western Christians. For Jews all over the world, the Holocaust's message was also essentially a pro-Zionist one. Never again must the Jewish people be defenseless, never again must it rely solely on the goodwill or "toleration" of non-Jews, never again should Jews take lightly the verbal rhetoric of anti-Semitism—the avowed intent to destroy them as a nation.

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Today, there is no denying the sad fact that Hitler's crimes have become part of the merciless propaganda struggle between partisans and adversaries of Zionism. The latter have generally and one-sidedly emphasized the innocence of the Arabs in the Nazi crimes against Jewry and the injustice committed by the West in making them pay for its own guilty conscience. More recently, however, both the Arabs and the West (especially Europe), by comparing Israel's treatment of the Palestinians with Nazi oppression of Jews, have conspired to turn the Holocaust *against* its victims, both parties thereby trying to free themselves of their historic guilt. The genocide of World War II has been turned in obscene fashion into a metaphor for Israeli actions in Lebanon and against the Arabs in general. All Hitler's sins, including racism, are being projected onto the Jewish state, which is described as holding itself above the law, acting with absolute impunity and disdain for moral values, and wreaking vengeance on its "innocent" Arab neighbors, driven by the conviction of its own superiority and divine chosenness.

This inversion of history, this imprisonment of the present in the past, is not easy to combat, because it clearly fulfills deep needs in the Western world, which, despite its democratic values, remains essentially Christian in its culture and its perceptions of the Jewish people. The continuing orgy of accusations against Israel postulates a kind of *a priori* guilt of the Jews—in this case the "Christ-killers" have become "mass murderers" of Palestinians. Just as Roman guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus was transferred to the Jews, so Israel was blamed by large segments of world opinion for the murders carried out by Christian militiamen in Sabra and Shatilla. For a part of the Christian West, as for the Arabs, the Soviets, and the Third World, the Israelis are the new Romans in Palestine or, rather, the new Nazis. Israeli control of the West Bank becomes The Occupation, calling to mind the Nazi occupation of Europe in World War II; the PLO becomes The Resistance fighting The Occupiers; Beirut becomes the Warsaw ghetto; Lebanon itself is transformed into Lidice, the Czech village wiped off the earth as a reprisal by the Nazis, or else into Oradour-sur-Glâne, where the SS massacred innocent French civilians in 1944.

By force of repetition, banalization, and trivialization, the reality of the Holocaust is slipping away and losing its substance. Every brutal action is reduced to the same level; every massacre, bombardment, or military operation in which civilians lose their

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lives becomes a "genocide." We have reached a point where, in the West, every minority group that wants to be taken seriously—blacks, homosexuals, women, etc.—must claim that it has experienced its own unique version of cultural genocide—not to mention the many national and political causes that use the same hyperbole. The Nazi Holocaust, an *exceptional* phenomenon by any standard, even in the long history of anti-Semitism, thus becomes *typical*—the touchstone and archetype by which others, first and foremost the Palestinians, stake their claim on the world's conscience. Unless it fights this parody of the past, which mocks the Holocaust and reduces it to a mere metaphor, Israel will inevitably lose one of its most precious assets in forging its own consciousness of a common fate—namely, the sense of the uniqueness of Jewish suffering and of the unique wickedness of the total extermination directed against the Jewish people. No other people, before or since, not the Russians, Poles, Czechs, Gypsies, or Armenians—and certainly not the Palestinians today—have had to face the threat of complete physical annihilation. Only in the case of the Nazi "Final Solution" were all utilitarian considerations of loss or gain, of *Realpolitik,* military strategy, and economics, utterly disregarded in pursuit of an uncompromising exterminatory drive.

All attempts, therefore, to transpose the Nazi horror to the Middle East, to fantasize the Israelis as Nazis, or the Palestinians as hunted Jews, are the product either of sheer ignorance and stupidity, cynical political calculation, or deliberate anti-Semitism. No one has imposed the Yellow Star on the Palestinians in Lebanon or in Judea and Samaria; they are not forcibly kept and starved to death in ghettos, sentenced to exhausting hard labor, or methodically gassed in extermination camps.* Why, then, the special fervor of the mass media in stigmatizing the Lebanese war as a calculated act of "genocide" and implying that this was Mr. Begin's "Final Solution" to the Palestinian problem—which can only mean the physical liquidation of the Palestinian people? Is not this brazen mendacity a form of anti-Jewish blackmail, an attempt to taint and intimidate in advance any supporter of Israel with the odium of siding with executioners?

*Indeed, when Lebanese Christians carried out a small-scale massacre of Palestinians in Sabra and Shatilla, this provoked the largest protest demonstration in Israel's history, much to the astonishment of the Phalange and the Arab world as a whole.

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The sad truth is that a significant number of Jews throughout the Diaspora, many of them sensitive, well intentioned, and by no means unintelligent, have fallen for this maneuvre and prematurely rushed to produce their certificates of divorce from Israel.

What appears to have affected such Jews, apart from the audio-visual spectacular of nightly Israeli bombing raids on color television, was the charge, shrewdly if hypocritically laid by the Western quality press, that the Jewish state was somehow no longer "Jewish." Suddenly the *idea* of Judaism, its universalist ethics and moral standards, became a matter of intense concern to non-Jews, insofar as it could be turned *against* Zionism. An Israel flexing its muscles must by definition be a betrayal of the Jewish "mission" even if military might, in the volatile conditions of the Middle East, proves to be a *sine qua non* of Jewish physical survival. Admittedly, the Israel of Mr. Begin and Mr. Sharon is some considerable distance removed from the visions of the Hebrew prophets, the ethics of the Baal Shem Tov, and the prudent maxims of our Jewish sages and rabbinical scholars. Indeed, not a few people within Israel would also argue that even by the standards of secular Zionism the present government has "betrayed" much of what was truly liberal, tolerant, and humanistic in the Jewish national renaissance. Whether this is really the case is not the purpose of this article to judge. What can be fairly charged against Mr. Begin is that his demagogic misuse of the Holocaust is *one* (though by no means the only or even the central) reason for the readiness of many non-Jews (and even Jews) to believe the wildest charges made against Israel. For many years Mr. Begin has used the Holocaust as a political weapon, encouraging the equation of Arafat with Hitler and of the PLO with the Nazis—the kind of false analogy that has now so cruelly backfired against Israel. Certainly Arafat and Hitler have had one aim in common—to kill Jews. But in terms of their general ideology, the means at their disposal, the balance of forces, and the basis of their conflict with the Jewish people—all comparison is gratuitous and an insult to the capacity of the Israel Defense Forces.

The propagandist inflation of the PLO into an omnipotent monster is in its own way symmetrical with the anti-Zionist obsession with an occult Jewish power and ironically obscures the central lesson of the Holocaust for the Jewish people—namely, that the existence of a strong Israel is the main shield against its recurrence. From a condition of total powerlessness the Jews have within less

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than forty years acquired a healthy modicum of power through the State of Israel, without which national survival would have proven very problematic in the modern world. This power, if used wisely, can forge the basis for coexistence with the Arab nations and the Palestinians in the Middle East. For such a *modus vivendi* to take place, it is incumbent on Israeli leaders as well as the Arabs to free themselves from the traumas of the past, from the mythologizing of history and the "demonologizing" of the enemy. It is no less the duty of the Western world to atone for its long history of racist oppression against Jews and Arabs by building confidence between the two sides instead of abjectly succumbing to anti-Zionist myths and unforgivably legitimizing a new wave of anti-Jewish violence on European soil.

The connection between the Holocaust and the Arab-Israeli conflict is a complex one that has not yet reached its conclusion. But unless the correct conclusions are drawn and the parties concerned succeed in extricating themselves from its shadow, we are likely in this age of thermonuclear war to arrive at a final solution to end all final solutions—one in which there are no victors and no vanquished.

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David Lipsey

LETTER FROM BRITAIN: THE FUTURE OF LABOR

The birth of the first major new political party in Britain for three-quarters of a century, the Social Democratic Party, seems to have caused quite as big a stir among American liberals as in progressive British opinion. Off the East Coast flights into Heathrow have stepped eager American journalists and academics like big-game hunters seeking the spoor of some fabled beast. The latest gossip about the SDP's progress and prospects was the hottest property the informed Englishman could offer his transatlantic interlocutor. In part this is no more than the natural human curiosity about something new. And it is reinforced by the strong ties of friendship that exist between the SDP's leading figures and the U.S. Roy Jenkins (the new party's leader), Shirley Williams, and David Owen are among the best-known British politicians in the States; while younger SDP members of Parliament, such as Tom McNally (former aide to Jim Callaghan, the ex-leader of the Labor Party) and John Roper (the SDP's leading foreign affairs specialist) have a deep knowledge of and affection for the U.S. David Marquand and Roderick MacFarquhar, both former MPs yet active intellectual figures in the new party, are well known in American academic circles. But there is, I think, one other important factor. For American liberals, there has been something rather uncomfortable about the leftward drift of the Labor Party. If, therefore, the Social Democrats could displace it as the second party of the English system, a psychological burden would be lifted from the shoulders of our American observers.

Of the thirty British MPs who joined the Social Democratic Party on or since its launch, all but one were formerly Labor MPs. This is not exactly a major split; after all, eight Labor MPs remain in the Labor Party for every one who defected. But it is true that one should look first for the origins of the new party to the tensions in the Labor Party itself.

It may not have seemed so at the time, but the origins of Labor's split were contained in its very roots. It was, from the first, an alliance between intellectual socialist reformers and trade

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unionists, eager only to ensure that the voice of the new industrial working class was heard in Parliament. For the socialists, the high point was the adoption in 1918, after the reorganization of the party, of the party's constitution, with the commitment to the "public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange." Their goal through the vicissitudes of fortune in the subsequent sixty-four years had been to translate that commitment from aspiration into reality.

In European terms there was, of course, nothing unusual in the early part of the century about a party of the Left adopting a genuinely socialist, or even a Marxist, perspective. Bernstein, and revisionism's day, had yet properly to dawn. But Britain was unusual in two respects. Elsewhere in Europe, the Left was split between two or more parties, one of which was a Communist Party. But in Britain, the Communist Party has never been a serious political force. So the Marxist element was within the Labor Party.

Secondly, unlike many European socialist parties, when times moved against the Marxists in the post-World War II years, the British Labor Party never underwent a process of historical modernization. The contrast is sharpest with the German SPD, which had its own Marxist roots and original Marxist program. But in the 1950s these had become irrelevant and politically counterproductive, and were abandoned with the party's adoption of the revisionist *Bad Godesburg* program of 1959.

Much of the leadership of the British Labor Party, and certainly Hugh Gaitskell, its leader from 1956 to 1962, would have liked to do the same in the British context. In the aftermath of the party's 1959 election defeat, Gaitskell sought to abolish the commitment of the party to universal public ownership—the debate on Clause Four in the constitution. The party, still attracted by this symbol of its own radical credentials, turned him down. In other words, it determined once more to attempt to contain within itself two conflicting ideologies. And the decision was apparently vindicated when, despite its divisions, it managed under Harold Wilson to sneak to a narrow victory in the 1964 general election.

As the sixties turned to the seventies and the seventies to the eighties, a number of developments in Britain made this posture an increasingly uncomfortable one. The first was, as in other industrial societies, the decline in the proportion of manual workers and the

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rise of a white-collar class: by 1976, the turning point, less than half the adult population were manual workers. The theme of *ouevrisme* as a strategy for a political party aiming at commanding a majority was in doubt. And, it became increasingly apparent, the new working class was not like its fathers. Increasingly, its members owned their own homes (home ownership in the U.K. is at U.S. levels) and their own cars; they had a stake in prosperity. The appeal of a fundamentalist party was thereby much weakened.

These factors ought to have been obvious to everyone; they were pointed out repeatedly by American intellectuals such as Daniel Bell, as well as by British intellectuals like the economist and future foreign secretary Anthony Crosland. What is extraordinary is how long they were evaded among most Left thinkers. In 1978, Eric Hobsbaum, the *doyen* of British Marxists, published in *Marxism Today* an essay ("The Forward March of Labour Halted") that recited these familiar facts. He seemed to convince no one on the Left; to a man, the Marxist intellectuals ducked his challenge and carried on for all the world as if nothing had happened.

In consequence, more and more of the debate within the Labor Party seemed deeply puzzling to the British electorate. For example, Labor's support for nationalization: as late as 1964, fifty-seven percent of the Labor electorate supported further measures of nationalization; in 1979, that proportion had fallen to thirty-two percent. Not surprisingly, this shift in belief was accompanied by a decline in Labor's proportion of the vote in the general elections. In 1951, its peak, it won the support of forty-nine percent of electors. In 1979, it managed just thirty-seven percent.* Britain's leading psephologist, Ivor Crewe of Essex University, said, "If everything went well for us and the Tories make an unholy mess of it, I can just about see Labour winning one more General Election."

Given these incompatibilities, and given Labor's lack of political success, perhaps the most pertinent question is not *why* Labor split; it is why Labor did not split *earlier,* and why, when the split did come, it was not deeper.

There are, I think, two main reasons for this. One is that the

*Admittedly, this decline in part reflected a fall in the share of the vote collected by both main parties. But Paul Whitely has shown (in *The Politics of the Labour Party,* 1982) that the fall was far faster for Labor than for the Conservatives.

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Labor Party has in its makeup an emotional commitment, based on the fact that it was not just a party but also a "movement," a "new Jerusalem." Secondly, the party had built in an element of institutional tolerance. In theory, sovereignty lay in the hands of the party's conference, the local activists and trade union worthies who meet annually at some seaside town. But in practice, the party's MPs, the Parliamentary Labor Party, had managed to maintain a considerable amount of autonomy from the conference. And, on the whole, it was in the interests of the unions to sustain that autonomy, since they could make their deals more easily—and necessarily—with the Parliamentary Party.

Through the 1960s and 1970s, thus, a strange dialectic persisted—between most outsiders, who thought that the incompatibilities within the Labor Party meant that it must split, and most insiders, who believed somehow that it never would.

The crisis of 1979 changed all that. With hindsight, it had been building up through the period in office of the Wilson and Callaghan governments. The Labor governments, like most Western intellectuals, were moving away from the Keynesian postwar consensus and toward monetarism, curbs on public spending, and, most of all, limiting the bargaining power of the trade unions as a means of dealing with inflation. The Labor Party, however, became yet more convinced of the ideas it had refused to drop at the time when their relevance seemed least—a belief in fundamentalist socialist solutions to the "development crisis of capitalism," and an impatience to see them made real.

What made the split actual this time was that the unions changed sides. In practice they had generally backed the pragmatists. But in the winter of 1979, Prime Minister Callaghan tried to impose a five-percent wage ceiling, which meant a substantial fall in union members' real incomes. Some union leaders could see the economic logic of the proposal. But equally, all could see a contrary organizational logic, one that threatened their very *raison d'être.* An incomes policy was to replace bargaining as the centerpiece of the wage-fixing system; if so, why then would anyone want to be in a trade union? The result was a series of damaging strikes, particularly in the public sector. Of critical importance was the action of the health and local government workers, culminating when Liverpool workers actually refused to carry out burials.

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For the government (a Labor one!), this confirmed that the unions were dominated by ruthless and politically motivated men. Communications broke down; the institutional stability, based on union support for the party leadership, was lost. So, when the government was defeated in the May 1979 general election, the unions had no desire to make excuses for it. Instead they sided with the Left and its fundamentalist critique.

Only one element of the party's institutional stability was still intact—the practical independence of its members of Parliament. The MPs, with their natural emphasis on the business of being elected and reelected, retained that independence; they were more oriented to the electorate at large, and thus were a bulwark against the ideologically motivated Left, whose eyes were solely on the party.

The new Left perceived this fact more clearly than the Right. In the wake of 1979, they mounted an institutional coup, deliberately designed to destroy this independence. It fell into two phases. First, in 1980, the party voted that every member of Parliament should, between every election, face "reselection." That is to say, he had to appear before his local constituency general management committee, the small group of activists who ran the local party, for reendorsement. The result was that, if the MPs stepped out of line, they could be dumped. And in a number of instances, right-wing Labor MPs have been disowned as candidates. But more often the threat worked the oracle; the MP trimmed his vote to suit his ruling party caucus. Then in stage two of the coup, in January 1981, the MPs lost another crucial right—to choose the party's leader and thus, by implication, its candidate for prime minister. In the future, the party leader would be chosen by a joint convention in which MPs would be in a minority. The unions, and local activists, would finally decide who would lead. And the first time the new system was used, Tony Benn, the Left candidate, came within a whisker of beating Denis Healey for the party's deputy leadership, though Healey had the support of three out of four Labor MPs.

It was the decision to change the system whereby MPs elected the party leader that provided the Social Democrats with the *causus belli* to make their break. But even when the break came it was not decisive. To a large extent, the old emotional loyalties have endured. Healey, the right-wing shadow Treasury spokesman Peter Shore, another stalwart (though nationalistic) right winger, and the great bulk of Labor MPs adamantly refused to join.

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The new party, it might be thought, had glittering prospects. Its leadership included Shirley Williams, the most popular of British politicians; Roy Jenkins, one of the most respected; and David Owen, an energetic if occasionally demonic figure. It faced a deeply unpopular government, held responsible for the creation of three million unemployed, and an even more unpopular opposition, whose social base had been steadily eroded. And it got a fair wind from the British media and establishment, who despised Mrs. Thatcher for her blatant materialism at least as much as it despised a Labor Party that threatened their own wealth. Moreover, by allying with the existing British Liberal Party—a party that had for years retained the allegiance of ten to twenty percent of the electorate—it established an immediate electoral base. At first, it seemed that this promise would rapidly be fulfilled. The first opinion polls showed the new party to be a stunning success, rising (in one poll) to gain the support of fifty-one percent of the electorate. At parliamentary bielections in Croydon, Crosby and Glasgow, and Hillhead, candidates of the existing parties were swept aside by the new alliance.

But those not carried away by euphoria could point to solid reasons to suspect this success. First, the trends that underlay the Labor Party's decline were neither sudden nor sharp. There still remains a substantial working-class vote. And its political habits are notoriously slow to break. Moreover, Labor has also succeeded in tapping a new constituency. In common with all industrialized countries, Britain experienced a strong surge in public expenditure through the sixties and seventies. It grew from 33.2 percent of GDP (gross domestic product) in 1960 to 41.3 percent in 1979. On its back grew up what was almost a new class. Social workers, teachers—what are called the "caring professions"—worked outside the market economy. They were motivated by strong ideals and frequently felt that their efforts were hampered only by the failure of others to vote them the funds they needed. Such people were drawn to Labor as a party that was antimarket and pro-public service.

Moreover, the British electoral system is heavily weighted against the new party. In Britain, in both national and local elections, voting is on the first-past-the-post system. There are no primaries, so the vote is divided up among however many candidates run. The result is that candidates can easily be elected with as little as a third of the popular vote.

That much was clear. What was less readily understood was

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that this system was particularly biased against the new Liberal-Social Democratic Alliance. British voting is traditionally class based. But in Britain, geography is also class based. The inner cities (= manual workers = Labor) are differentiated from suburbia (= white-collar workers = Conservative). Blue-collar workers are a minority nationwide, but a majority in the north. These simple facts of geography give the Labor and Conservative parties strongholds—the equivalents of Massachusetts for the Democrats—that are beyond storming. But the Social Democrats have no such strongholds. It has been calculated by psephologists at Nuffield College, Oxford, that if each party polled one-third of the nationwide vote in the next general election, Labor would win the most seats, the Conservatives would come in second, and the Liberal-Social Democratic Alliance would win fewer than fifty of the 635 Commons seats. And the proof of the psephologists' pudding came in the May local elections, where the alliance polled twenty-five percent of the national vote—but only a little over five percent of the seats.

Moreover, as the new party has gone on, it has become clear that its ideology is by no means as appealing as may at first blush have seemed likely. It is moderate (good, in British political terms); but it is also pro-European (bad, in British terms); and it is perceived as too liberal on what Scammon and Wattenburg have christened the "social issues" of law and order and race (in British terms, very bad).

The events of the fall and winter show the variability of British —as of all—politics. The Tory government has benefited from the war in the Falklands, though it is not clear how much of the fervor will last. The Foot leadership in the Labor Party, with the reluctant support of the trade unions, has maintained its power; Tony Benn has gone off to sulk. And the luster of the Social Democrats has diminished. Most puzzling of all, though unemployment has reached the fourteen-percent mark, there has been little overt action by the unemployed, though one suspects that the continuation of high unemployment will benefit the Labor Party, not the new alliance.

Whatever the outcomes, what is certain is the survival in some form of a Labor Party, and I shall close with a few remarks on its nature. It should be said clearly that it will not be a Trotskyist party. A great deal of attention in Britain has focused on the efforts of the party leadership to expel the Trotskyite Militant tendency, which has practiced the "entryist" tactics of attempting to infiltrate the Labor Party and then use it for revolutionary ends. But whether it succeeds

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or not is likely to prove beside the point. In a few local parties the Trotskyites are a majority, but only where the constituencies have become badly run down over the years. Though Militants have provided half a dozen parliamentary candidates, only one or two have had, on any realistic assessment, any prospect of being elected. At the moment (winter, 1982) the Center-Right leadership of the party (Foot, Shore, Hattersley et al.) are in control largely because of the support of the trade unions. The problem is in the constituency parties where the local activists, reinforced by a strong neutralist sentiment, tend to be strongly "left." And these local parties are exercising strong voice over the selection—and reselection—of candidates.

As for the Labor Party that will remain, its active members will be overwhelmingly middle class—which will not stop them from using the rhetoric of class war. With most of them coming from the public sector, they will be motivated by a combination of idealism and guilt at how comfortable they are compared with their generally working-class parents. Their policies will be vaguely dotty, owing much to the residue of the student generation of 1968: a blend of Marx and Gramsci and Roszak and Marcuse, with a touch of an idealized version of Fidel Castro. But the continuing institutional link with the trade unions will prevent them from running the party purely as an intellectual debating society.

How such a party will fare electorally depends more on the economic context than on its own internal composition and rhetoric. Reality and responsibility exert a logic of their own. If, by some chance, a new Labor government comes into power at the next election, the need to deal with the problems of stimulating growth in order to pay for an extended public sector may lead it to adopt the ideas of the "siege economy" proposed by a group of Cambridge economists, and to exercise strong controls—but it would have to be that of the unions as well. If, as it now appears, it is more likely that a Tory government will be returned, the Labor Party will slip more and more into the hands of the Left, and a deeper polarization of the British polity may eventuate. If so, and if reforms in the electoral system can take place, the Liberal-Social Democratic Alliance may be the eventual inheritor of such a debacle. For, as in most Western countries, the electorate tends to the center, even if the parties often do not. But whether the Social Democrats have the staying power remains to be seen—a conclusion that invariably ends all political letters.

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François Bondy

LETTER FROM ITALY

Since 1974 the young publishing house of Adelphi in Milan has printed no less than five novels by a hitherto unknown author who is now considered the most remarkable literary discovery. The *fortuna*, as the Italians say, of his novels and the *caso* or life of the author have been more widely discussed than any other literary topic. Guido Morselli's first published novel, *Roma senza Papa,* is set around 1999. The growing ecumenism and the total surrender of the Roman Church to modernity stand in its center: marriage is recommended to the priests; the Pope—an American—has a "spiritual friendship" with a Zen Buddhist lady; theological treatises are turned out by computers. All this is seen through the eyes of an elderly Swiss priest from Uri, who, although married, is a traditionalist and is shocked, saddened, or amused by what he encounters in Rome, which the Pope has left without its main tourist attraction, having taken up residence in the drab suburb of Zagarolo. Both the religious content and the glamor of the Church have waned and survive as quaint folklore. There is more melancholic irony than biting satire in this picture of a Vatican *ridimensionnato*—cut to size to fit an increasingly provincial Italy.

Morselli's second novel, *Contropassato prossimo,* takes place in the second decade of this century, encompassing World War I, which ends now with the victory of the Central Powers, thanks to the secret building of a tunnel into Valtellina that allows the Italian army to be wiped out from the start. A United Europe emerges, presided over by Walter Rathenau. But postwar Europe is in chaos, so the fictive ending is not much different from the real thing. With its many historical characters, this novel is more of an intellectual game than is *Rome without the Pope*. Yet it is a novel, as is any book in prose that cannot be otherwise defined.

Morselli's third published novel is called *Divertimento 1889*. It is an imaginary chronicle of a love affair that places King Umberto in the arms of a wealthy German lady somewhere between Andermatt and Goeschenen. This novel nostalgically evokes the *belle époque* in all its ruddy Piedmontese variety.

The fourth novel to be published, *Il Communista*, may be Morselli's first masterpiece. There is no play with hypotheses; the

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novel enters squarely into the Italian present-day reality. Walter Ferrannini is a leading Communist, a member of Parliament. His roots are in the cooperative movement of Emilia. He has spent many years in exile, mainly in the United States, where he married and divorced and to which he returns at the end of the novel for a short and unhappy visit. He has to sit in judgment with more important party leaders on a heretic who rejects the bourgeois degeneration of the party and, for reasons of moral coherence, remains an unreconstructed Stalinist. Ferrannini himself becomes, without being aware of it, a deviationist, because Alberto Moravia persuades him to express his thoughts on work in *Nuovi Argomenti*. He is more influenced by his observations on Russia and by his reading of Hannah Arendt than by the accepted ideology. This, one guesses, will not lead to his exclusion from the party, which, however, frowns on his liaison with a married woman. Apart from a short novel, *Una campagna elettorale,* written in the early fifties by Enzo Bettiza, this is the only Italian novel to date dealing convincingly with the life of Italian Communists and their hierarchy.

Recently a fifth short novel has appeared—*Dissipatio H. G.* The initials stand for *humani generis*. The narrator alone is spared by an accident of which he becomes only gradually aware. Mankind has vanished in an unfathomable catastrophe without leaving any bodily trace. The survivor wanders through Crisopolis (Zurich) and the mountains, reliving memories and pondering the strange fate of being, perhaps, the last man on earth. Here is, again, a hypothetical intellectual premise, but also a strangely tender exercise in solipsism, a most radical "Goodbye to all that."

Guido Morselli has become famous only in the last four years, but he had published two books much earlier—one on Proust and another on *Realism and Imagination*, which did not attract much attention. A copy of the second book with a personal dedication to Morselli's teacher, the philosopher Banfi, was recently found on a *carretto*, uncut.

One may wonder about this author who appears as much at home among priests as among Communist *apparatchiks* and who can evoke so perfectly the small old world of Umberto's Italy. The question, however, should not be, Who is Morselli? but, Who *was* Morselli? In the late summer of 1974, this sixty-one-year-old descendant of a wealthy family from northern Italy shot himself in his villa near Varese, a few days after two more publishers had

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rejected his manuscripts. He left a letter to a lady who had been in his confidence for many years that simply said, "It makes no sense to go on living." On his desk lay a folder containing all the rejection letters. On the cover of this folder Morselli had drawn a flask—*un fiasco*, symbol of failure.

The Italian publishers, always eager to discover new homegrown or foreign talents, had turned down all of Morselli's novels. Some well-known "scouts" are now embarrassed, lest their motivations for the rejection become known. *Il Communista* had actually been accepted by a major publisher in Milan and set in type. Then the literary director was replaced and the new man—probably eager not to offend the powerful Communist Party—rejected the book. Morselli could have gone to court and might have imposed publication. But he was a proud and shy person who wouldn't have dreamt of doing such a thing. One friend recalls that once Morselli went to see an employee in a publisher's office and then left hurriedly when he saw the publisher himself approaching. They had been to school together and Morselli feared that he might be suspected of using this connection to his advantage.

Guido Morselli, who had been in Sicily as an officer during World War II, lived a life close to nature, in loneliness and silence. Most pictures show him on horseback. Rousseau was his favorite author. He was attractive to women and went through several stormy but not unhappy affairs.

The nondiscovery of a writer whose topics were obviously interesting, whose prose easy to read, remains a mystery. One is reminded of the long obscurity of Italo Svevo. Had Svevo died at sixty-one he would never have learned that he was an important writer or, as Roberto Bazlen wrote to young Eugenio Montale in 1926, "the only modern novelist Italy has produced." As a comparison, however, the name of Robert Musil comes more easily to mind, because of Morselli's hypothetical way of narrating. For him reality was only one possibility among many, and not necessarily the most relevant one. By naming Svevo and Musil, I do not intend to claim for Guido Morselli a comparable importance. Long obscurity and suicide are, as we know, powerful stimulants for posthumous overrating; the skeptical, self-doubting Morselli would have been the first to mock such a turn of fate. In fact, Morselli is perfectly attuned to present-day Italy. In *Il Communista,* Ferrannini ponders that his party "is polemicizing with the Christian Democrats and the

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reformists, just waiting for the right moment to offer itself as an ally." Written nearly twenty years ago, this is all too obvious today.

In *Roma senza Papa* and in *Il Communista,* Morselli has evoked two ideological world powers shrinking into shapeless provinciality. His main theme may have been provinciality itself—the provincial Italy of long ago with a style of its own, the new provincialism of post-Fascist Italy, rejecting not only the rhetoric but any creed whatsoever, any style, any faith in its own destiny or meaning. In *Contropassato prossimo* Italy is wiped out in a few days, a simple geographical fact. This provincialism is often presented with parallels to Switzerland. It is the recognition of a reality but also of the loss of something undefinable yet perhaps precious.

This summary cannot do justice to a writer whose four or five more novels, several stories, essays, and plays await publication. What about his last work, *Dissipatio H. G.*? We may read it as the strangest exercise ever in autobiography. One man is separated through death from mankind. The author who always liked to play with hypotheses made of this man a survivor and condemned all others to doom. But this novel, completed shortly before the author's own death, may be read as a description of his suicide *al rovescio*—in reverse.

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CONTEMPORARY NONSENSE

All Happy Families Are Alike . . . .

There is an inescapable affinity between socialists and communists. Critics who are external to both of these groups are aware of such an affinity and their members also have some sense of that affinity, much as they disapprove of each other's actions and however vehemently each censures the other. Many socialists feel sufficient affinity with the Soviet Union and with communists to be embarrassed by what they do; they regret the misdeeds of communists as one regrets a misdeed by a member of one's own family or institution. The relations between many social democrats and collectivist liberals on the one hand, and communists on the other, are like the relations of two religious sects which have become separated from one another. Each is embittered by what it regards as the other's betrayal of the ideal which both invoke.

Edward Shils, "The Social Ownership of the Means of Production," in *Survey* (London), #113, Autumn 1980 (published Summer 1982), p. 134

Miss Lonelyheart

The journalistic issue of the day may well be the dangers of an reasons for loneliness. As Philip Slater said in his book, "The Pursuit of Loneliness," American cultural institutions are structured to make relations among people difficult at best. We hold as self-evident the need for "space," for privacy, for individualism, for the right to compete. No wonder we are wary of one another. We are lonely because we have cut ourselves off from traditional values, from history, from the future.

The major theme in sociology since Emile Durkheim's 19-th century [sic!] work, "Suicide," has been that man's pathological behavior—crime, alcoholism, suicide—may ultimately result from alienation from society.

Vicki Abt, Associate Professor of Sociology, Pennsylvania State University, in a letter to the Sunday *New York Times Magazine,* on "Loneliness in America," September 19, 1982

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The Bourgeois Playground

Cary Goodman's *Choosing Sides* is largely a history of the playground movement in the United States, the people who started it, the direction it took, and its effects on the immigrant population of New York City's Lower East Side. He points out that when the immigrants first arrived the streets were their playgrounds. There, he argues, they felt a sense of freedom that allowed them to assert control over their environment, while the playgrounds, with their fences, rules, and regulations, were the embodiment of compartmentalization and control. He asserts that street life engendered a feeling of camaraderie that both created and solidified social networks. . . .

The playground reformers are depicted as elitists whose condescending attitudes toward the new arrivals were characterized chiefly by an effort to teach them bourgeois culture. . . .

The heart of Goodman's thesis is that the playground movement was nothing more (or less) than an attempt by greedy capitalists to dominate and control the working classes. He uses all the catchwords employed by Marxists—"the bosses," "cultural imperialism," "tool of alienation," "false consciousness," and so on. There is a strident and biased tone throughout the entire book. One of the most blatant examples appears on page 49: "But in capitalism, what you see ain't what you get, pop songs or not."

William B. Helmreich, review of *Choosing Sides: Playground and Street Life on the Lower East Side* by Cary Goodman, in *Contemporary Sociology,* July 1982

The Brezhnev-Nixon Pact

Nor could the Nixon Administration have been so arrogant with Allende without the tacit permission of the Soviet Union. The coup took place in the heady days of detente, when Henry the Clever and Leonid the Shrewd agreed to stay out of each other's sphere of influence. . . . Chavkin . . . obscures the lessons of Allende's downfall: if you've got a revolutionary situation arm the workers despite what the Communists tell you. And always be careful driving down the democratic road to socialism: the superpowers are waiting at every crossroad to run you down.

Jonathan Maslin, review of *The Murder of Chile* by Samuel Chavkin, in *The Nation,* September 11, 1982

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Fighting for Your Life-Style

Why is capitalism worth fighting for? You can read the answer in Andy Warhol's *Interview*. The glamorous life-style presented on its pages is in many ways the American version of Nirvana. Warhol reveals the carrot that awaits us at the finish line of the rat race.

quoted from *Art in America* in a double-page advertisement by *Interview,* in the *Paris Review,* #79.

Why Russia Is Scared of Israel

The ideology of Communism which energized the Bolshevik revolution and formed the basis of the Soviet state under Lenin was to a surprising extent Jewish in origin; experienced by Jews, transmitted by them. A generation passed, and the Jewish state was created. A generation after *that,* and everyone was beginning to say: "No one in the Soviet Union believes in Communism anymore. It is a bankrupt ideology," and so on. The sole remaining locus of Communism's influence seemed to be the United Nations. And there, significantly enough, the undermining of Zionism (in reality, the destruction of Israel) was high on its agenda. It may be, then, that Zionism, accused of racism, is seen as a threat at the UN for the more relevant reason that it is eating away at Communism and gradually destroying it. Zionism has diverted to Israel the crucial Jewish energy and faith that was needed to sustain the ideology underlying the Soviet state. This in turn is rapidly reducing that country to a decaying husk of tyranny.

Tom Bethell, "The Once and Future Israel," in *The American Spectator,* September 1982. (Mr. Bethell holds the De Witt Wallace Chair in Communications at the American Enterprise Institute.)

Super Social Realism

I have thought for a long time that social realism provides a kind of dialectical synthesis between the super-subjectivism of naturalism and the super-objectivism of agit-prop. To explain public life in the theatre it is first necessary to be recognizable, and only then, having won the audience's trust, to place those recognizable phenomena within the context of a perceived social truth. In my play *Destiny,* I included a scene where a group of

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people met together to form a branch of a neo-fascist party. The characters were carefully selected to be representative of the various different groups and interests thought likely to support fascist movements in contemporary Britain, and at the end of the scene a leader of the party made a speech in which he brought together all of the disparate and indeed contemporary interests and fears of his audience, weaving them neatly into the classic Nazi conspiracy theory of history. On the page, the scene looked as if it had been written from a chart, which, as it happens, was the case. But on the stage, I think what happened was that the recognizability of the characters in that situation—the draughty hall, the empty seats, the feed-back microphone, the echoing silences and agonizing crossed purposes—gave flesh and substance to my analysis of their actual and subsequent behaviour, and the hopes and fears of the real people portrayed combined with the hopes and fears of the real people watching to create a genuinely mutual understanding of why they came and why they stayed, which it is the unique capacity of the theatre to create.

David Edgar, "Viewpoint: politics and performance," *Times Literary Supplement,* September 10, 1982

He Kept His Thoughts to Himself

THE EISENHOWER DIARIES. More conservative than his politics. $19.95

advertisement of the Conservative Book Club

The Libyan Model

Ernest van den Haag's proposal for an American Foreign Legion ("An American Foreign Legion?" Fall 1981) is a fine example of the creativity automatically rejected by decadent polities (and politicians) as "unthinkable," "unacceptable," and so on. Contrary to the usual reaction I get when I try this idea on unsuspecting friends, a Foreign Legion would be squarely in American traditions. It would rescue the tradition of voluntarism, always awkward to reconcile with periodic conscription. It would integrate it with the tradition of immigration, sustained and indeed strengthened in recent years without much obvious regard for national welfare or interest. And it would provide a refuge for the principle of merit, currently endangered for domestic political reasons.

Foreign Legions are not as rare as is generally believed. Currently the

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most prominent is probably the army of Libya, financed by petrodollars and swelled far out of proportion to the desert state's size by Moslem—and now, it appears, American—mercenaries. But historically not only the French but also the British Empire was largely built by hired soldiers. In the case of Britain, the troops were employed by the Chartered Companies who actually represented Britain in their respective franchises. The British Army's famous Irish-Catholic regiments—the Connaught Rangers, Munster Fusiliers, and so on—all traced their origin to the largely Irish force recruited by the East India Company about 200 years ago. . . .

There is a sense, however, in which an American Foreign Legion would be unique. America is not only a nation but also an idea. It has adherents in every country on the globe. Its legionnaires would be idealists, and their volunteering would be a standing reproach to their governments: a sort of inverse human rights policy.

Of course, we must make some concession to contemporary taste. "Foreign Legion" sounds imperialistic, but what hearts could be melted at the idea of an "International Brigade."

Peter Brimelow
BARRON'S
New York

Ernest van den Haag replies:

Peter Brimelow has done something I also thought impossible: he has greatly improved on my original idea and its elaboration. I am grateful.

Exchange of letters in
Policy Review, Spring 1982

Editor's Note: The International Brigade was the name of the Communist-controlled unit in the Spanish Civil War.

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BOOKS

A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MANN

THOMAS MANN: THE MAKING OF AN ARTIST 1875–1911. By Richard Winston. Alfred A. Knopf. $17.95.

This was clearly not its intention, but Richard Winston's splendid biography of Thomas Mann's earlier years (up to the age of 36 in 1911) serves to remind us how far we are now from the august modern figure who died only a few decades ago. Even when Mann was a contemporary, whose work was judged afresh as each new book appeared, he was not, so to speak, one of us, a member of our literary family. There was a certain distance separating him that made for strangeness, for a lack of that familiarity that exists among writers of a similar generation and one's own country. But it was not only that he was a European writer. So were Proust and Kafka. It was due rather to a monumental quality in Mann's writing, a quality, to be sure, blended with ironic and prosaic observations, but marked by a loftiness of theme, and a prose that reached the upper registers of consciousness and tone. Even his earliest works had the effect both of immediately raising Mann above the common run of fiction and of making him appear to be a commanding figure, above our more homely sensibility. It could have been said of Mann, as Sartre said of Camus, that "he carried a pedestal with him." But it was not a moral pedestal, a posture of conscience, as in the case of Camus. It was an intellectual pedestal that permitted Mann to survey the human landscape and to endow the smallest details of people's lives with large, though ambiguous, meanings.

In this respect, there is a nineteenth-century, a premodern, feel about Mann's essays as well as his fiction. Its trademark is the big theme, the big canvas. Not that Proust or Kafka or Joyce did not also explore large subjects, and Proust and Joyce certainly covered a broad scene. But Mann's large scale and probing of depth were more explicit; and his prose was appropriately more elegant and more sententious—at times, almost Wagnerian, which is not surprising, for Wagner was an early admiration.

But it was not only the panoramic vision that distinguished Mann, it was also the content of that vision. In fact, Mann was the

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most representative modernist figure, and it is precisely his almost obsessive concern with the nature of the artist that has been taken to be characteristic of modernism. Like many of his contemporaries, but even more programmatically, Mann played with and agonized over the fate of the chosen man. There seems to be little doubt that the age of modernism is over, though some of its currents still persist in ways that have still to be adequately identified and defined. In any case, writing today has in the main dissolved the nineteenth-century idea of the problematic existence and status of the artist—the elite personality—into the more prosaic conventions of common experience. But at the center of the modernist mind was the dialogue as well as the conflict between the underground of art and the prevailing mores of society. For Mann, the complexities and inversions of this idea took many forms.

One of the accomplishments of Winston's sketch of Mann's early life is the interweaving of Mann's major themes with the events and the personal relations that helped form his thinking. We see his early awareness of himself as both a person apart and one grasping for the common elements of experience, as one torn between the pull of the forbidden, represented by his dark, artistic mother, and the burgher discipline of his Nordic father. This tension was also illustrated throughout Mann's life in his attraction to and repulsion by his brother Heinrich. Winston tracks down in Mann's dealings with his family and his youthful friends those mixed feelings about duty and pleasure that were elaborated into the polarities between the moral and the esthetic spheres of thinking and acting. And Winston does this in a low-keyed manner that lifts the story of Mann's life above a simple narrative and at the same time lowers the pitch of the sweeping observations about the human condition in Mann's writing.

For example, Winston traces some of the influences that came together in *Tonio Krueger,* a story in which many of Mann's major themes are made explicit. Nietzsche, Wagner, German estheticism, middle-class restraint, the identification of art with Southern darkness and sensuality and of Northern lightness with the Protestant ethic—all these are merged with his boyhood friendships in the creation of the blond, blue-eyed symbols of health and stability, and the dark adventurers who live on the edge of art and disease. Tonio is a fictional surrogate for Mann himself, in his wavering between the poles in Mann's extreme formulation of the modernist creed. Simi-

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larly, Winston points out how the thematics of life and art are connected adroitly in *Doctor Faustus* and *Death in Venice.* In discussing *Death in Venice,* Winston also goes into the homosexual element, and though he is quite open in his treatment of Mann's erotic tendencies and attractions, of what Mann himself referred to as his "sexual inversion," he does not play it up either for its own shock interest or as a clue to Mann's entire being.

There are many other things in the biography that round out our picture of Mann, such as Mann's philo-Semitism, tempered somewhat by his very Germanic sense of himself, his concern with his health, his worldly awareness of his career and the reception of his work by reviewers and readers. Mann was not known for his modesty, and, after the success of *Buddenbrooks,* he said that this was the first time that a German book entered the arena of European literature. Apparently, he thought Goethe was more provincial. We are also given a strong sense of how much Mann was part of the intellectual traditions and the community of his time. Among the figures with whom he had some contact were Wedekind, George, Wasserman, Rilke, Freud, Hesse, Mahler, Bruno Walter. He was also strongly influenced by Schopenhauer, Heine, Wagner, among others. And, of course, he knew most of the editors and reviewers for the leading journals.

One of the virtues of Winston's unrhetorical style is that it deflates somewhat the ponderous image of Mann that we have inherited. It almost makes him appear to be like any other writer, which is not easy, considering the myths in which he has been encrusted. Mann might have represented an extreme case of inflation of an author's image, but there is also an inflationary tendency today, rooted in our idea of art, that transforms writers into classics, to be studied, embalmed, textually exhumed. Even if Mann does not lend himself to such embalmment, it probably would have been accomplished by the culture of the museum, the schools, and academic criticism, all of which work to separate the *study* of literature from the *experience* of literature, by taking it out of its mundane origins, placing it in a pantheon, and making it part of a realm of abstract, timeless thought. We are supposed to forget that *literature* was originally *writing,* that is, that it was created by writers struggling over each work, alternately sure and unsure how good it is, trying new subjects and styles, having to make it with every new book. However important the ultimate product may be, it is good to

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remember that writing is not a transcendent activity. And anyone who has not succumbed to the latest literary theories can report that students who are expected to analyze classics have no idea how a work of fiction or any essay is actually produced.

Perhaps the best thing to be said of Winston's first installment of a biography of Mann is that, unlike the deconstructionists, who, contrary to their claims, mystify the act of writing, it actually demystifies the subject. It is unfortunate that Winston was unable to complete the project.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

THE RED AND THE BLACK

THE LEFT BANK: WRITERS, ARTISTS, AND POLITICS FROM THE POPULAR FRONT TO THE COLD WAR. By Herbert R. Lottman. Houghton Mifflin Company. $15.95.

TEACHERS, WRITERS, CELEBRITIES: THE INTELLECTUALS OF MODERN FRANCE. By Regis Debray. Schocken Books. $19.95.

Both Herbert R. Lottman, correspondent and biographer of Camus, and Regis Debray, counselor of cultural affairs in François Mitterand's government and former revolutionary, show that intellectuals don't lie: they just fool themselves for the sake of their politics. Both have written about the French intelligentsia; both acknowledge the importance of history and agree that French politics beginning with Voltaire and Hugo always had its writers on call; both draw on memoirs by André and Clara Malraux, by André Gide and his *petite dame* Maria Van Rysselberghe, by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, and many more; and many of the same names recur in their texts and indexes. But the similarities end there. For *The Left Bank* tells a rather straightforward story of politically committed people and of their dialogues and shifts, in relation to the specific twists and turns of fascism and communism between the thirties and the Cold War. *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities* is much less evenhanded, using selective facts and opinions to substantiate that French intellectual history from 1880 to 1930 was made primarily by

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academics; that between 1920 and 1960 publishers dominated; and that the latter were replaced by the "mediologists," who continue to rule. Thus these two books themselves are products of their authors' past politics—of Lottman's left-inspired humanism and his penchant for historical detail, and of Debray's Althusserian hangover, manifesting itself in the discovery of historical breaks.

While Debray argues that intellectuals are only defended or attacked, Lottman manages to describe them. He begins by recreating their milieu, their personal relationships, daily encounters, meetings in coffee houses, bars, and publishing offices—by noting who was invited to Daniel Halevy's or Gaston Gallimard's salon—while registering their various responses to the rise of fascism and to the increasing evidence of communist duplicity. The emphasis on how they addressed one another, over what incident they became friends or enemies, how closely they lived to each other, and the village atmosphere that prevailed (particularly in the thirties and often the subject of gossip columns) at first veils the serious thrust of Lottman's book. But, as he tells us in the introduction, what was said and written on the Left Bank "echoed throughout Europe, and as far away as Stalinist Russia and capitalist America"; it had much greater impact than its artistic achievement would warrant. So, as we read about the friendships between right and left intellectuals, who often had gone to the same schools and who worked at the same universities, we realize why personal ties at times overrode political conflicts. Most of us are familiar with the lives of left writers such as Sartre, de Beauvoir, Camus, or Merleau-Ponty, but we know less about their counterparts on the right: about the *rive gauche* group formed in the mid-1930s and led by Robert Brasillach; about Charles Maurras, and the group's paper *Je Suis Partout;* about the platform provided for genuine Nazis to address young artists; or about Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, long known for his anti-Semitism, who edited the *Nouvelle Revue Française* during the Occupation, and whose suicide saved him from being tried as a collaborator.

To talk of the grip by left and right totalitarianism during that period, of the evil inspired by Hitler and Stalin, has almost become a cliché. Nevertheless, the politics both brilliant and second-rate thinkers addressed, and for which some of them lost their lives, were directly influenced by what was said in Berlin and Moscow. And, without comparing the numbers of people killed in the Holocaust and the Gulag, or the numbers of years these systems remained in

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place, we must acknowledge that fewer intellectuals were taken in by fascism than by communism—and that the naiveté of well-intentioned, honest, and democracy-loving people was colossal. Inspired by the promises of Marx for a better world and led to believe that Soviet society was its incarnation, they tended to cling to their hopes for a proletarian revolution in spite of overwhelming evidence—until much later, when they got ready to publish their "self-criticisms."

Lottman locates Ilya Ehrenburg, the Soviet writer, correspondent, and secret agent who moved easily between Moscow and Paris, at the center of this grand deception. He facilitated many jaunts to the Soviet Union—and to the First Soviet Writers Congress in August 1934, which was followed in 1935 by its international counterpart in Paris. (A similar congress took place in the U.S. about that time.) Told that the early congresses were to oppose fascism, participants continued to be duped about their other aims. Later congresses built on these intellectuals' genuine wish for peace, and on their glorification of the working class, to serve the interests of the communists. What amazes us most of all is the fact that the French were blind for so long, probably due to their chauvinism, which, after World War II, turned into a special sort of anti-Americanism. By then, Paris and its literary Left Bank had become a cog in the machine, as Communists were expected to offer their reputations to defend, for example, Soviet philosophy of science, or to conform to a narrow doctrine of Socialist Realism. They were supposed to make speeches justifying the purges in Eastern European countries and to help the Communist side in the "show trials." Feeling themselves trapped between the two large power blocs—Stalin offered peace and brotherhood and the United States guaranteed basic freedoms—some began to talk of a third way, that is, of neutrality. One of the major proponents of this position, of course, was Sartre—until 1951, when he found that it was "impossible to take an anti-Communist position without turning against the proletariat" and declared himself a fellow traveler. As we know, this led to his break with Camus, whose *L'homme révolté*—an examination of the perversion of the revolutionary ideal to justify murder, and a more "left" reply to Stalinism than Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*—is probably the best work on these dilemmas.

Lottman's book ends before Krushchev's revelations at the XXth Party Congress in 1956, before Sartre's move away from the Party, and before the many other defections, when "the Left Bank

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was taking a long vacation from politics" and turned inward. Debray's book takes a look backward from the end of this "vacation," from the next politicized period—when the Left Bank was at the barricades in 1968, and when a new generation of intellectuals and students, joined by Sartre and others from the "old guard," once more got into the old issues.

Since then, argues Debray, literature and authors have been replaced by the "mediocracy," which already began to emerge at the time of Balzac, when words were first found to confer power. Leaning on available data, Debray looks at the numbers of people involved at various times in writing, teaching, and the press, to find that the expansion of these professions has created a large intellectual work force. This leads him to conclude also that in socialist systems intellectuals are integrated (media workers belong to the Writers' Union) and the "creative" intelligentsia, because represented in the Supreme Soviet, is said to be subordinated; whereas in capitalist systems their marginality conceals actual political power. Relying once more on statistics to show how the number of university lecturers doubled between 1880 and 1930, and that the sudden expansion led the university to lose its hegemony "over public life and over the intellectual corps itself," Debray links these phenomena to the organic decadence of French society. The decline of teachers was found to accompany the rise of authors—whom Debray praises and dismisses, depending upon how he likes their politics. Hence he can call Nizan's *Chiens de garde,* in which he turned against the Communists, a "great-minded harangue," and he can speculate that if Nizan were alive now he would refute his own argument; or that "today's Dreyfuses will stay on Devil's Island"—because this triumph by intellectuals represented the defeat of writers.

By dedicating the period between 1920 and 1960 to the publisher, Debray also indicates that power came to rest with the production and distribution of works rather than with their intellectual worth. This is not to say that he is wrong or unfaithful to the diaries and records he consulted, but only that this "period" seems arbitrarily chosen. Why did the Gallimard hegemony last until the 1960s rather than the 1950s? Is Debray deliberately subsuming both World War II and the Cold War so that he does not have to deal—except in his very special fashion—with who stood where on what issue? Of course writers worked for publishers, edited their friends, and thus had "the ability to produce [their] own media and to choose [their]

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own supports." But this does not necessarily mean that publishers imposed their own culture on France. Television coverage did indeed influence the 1968 events, but does this mean that now more than in 1933 or 1939–1945 individuals are able to escape the larger political struggles in their personal lives, or that events replaced work as journalists replaced authors? Even though such formulations must be understood within the French context, we cannot ignore the ideological slant. Nor can we make much sense of Debray's cosmic leaps: from one country to another, from one discipline to another, from one theory to another, from one writer to another. But in conjunction with surveys, Debray's affirmations convey an air of scientism. And his scientific Marxism is more palatable than Althusser's, because its tone is lighter; puns and epigrams abound. Just the same, Debray avoids talking of his former politics, although he does suggest that sometimes terrorists may reinvent democracy.

In his introduction to the book, Francis Mulhern does refer to Debray's Althusserian and Leninist background. He goes on to maintain, however, that the formulations about "mediocratic" culture describe what the Leavises referred to as "standardization and leveling down," and what the Frankfurt scholars called "the culture industry." Mulhern, by relating the emergence of the media to advanced industrialization, to the introduction of research and development—the ensuing mass market—and to changes in education, then compares conditions in France to those in Britain and the United States. Because France's technology and educational systems lagged far behind, he finds that "the entente between the University and the Third Republic was the formative experience of intellectuals," of a "republican clergy." This *république des professeurs* is said to have been epitomized by Sartre, whose existentialist commitment allegedly had its origins in Cartesian philosophy as well as in the "established morality." In contrast, the British intelligentsia, educated at Oxford and Cambridge, is found to have its roots in the hegemonic Conservative Party and to allow for inroads by a few individuals from the newer academic institutions. The ensuing cooptation supposedly contained Marxism within the university; its politics did not spread outside as it did in France.

According to Mulhern, the United States was saved from a similar fate by its open and diversified educational system and by the "creed of active national conformism"—derived from John

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Dewey's educational thought—which valued individuals' critical independence as a cultural norm. These cultural conditions, says Mulhern, allowed for the emergence of the milieu around *Partisan Review;* and the East European origin of many of its members, along with their Trotskyism and internationalism, he continues, made for their cohesion. Mulhern ignores the fact that neither Dwight Macdonald, Mary McCarthy, nor Fred Dupee was Jewish; that Trotsky wrote for the magazine in the beginning, until William Phillips and Philip Rahv made clear that they would not join with him, though they were sympathetic to his anti-Stalinism; and that their openness to European modernism was different from the Communists' internationalism. Mulhern forgets that the magazine was started in order "to provide a forum for left and modernist thought"—a forum denied not only in conservative but in all other left publications, since the latter were dominated by the Communists. Yes, *Partisan Review* was against mass culture where the latter negated quality; and it did not print what Mulhern subsumes under populist or conservative nostalgia. But what he calls "political disinterestedness" was a leftist anticommunism.

Similarities between *Left Bank* and *Partisan Review* intellectuals, however, did exist: in both circles discussions were able to transcend ideology, at least much of the time; politics and writing were equally important; and they all managed to capture the spirit of their culture. So even if the rewriting of history now has become fashionable, it is distorting to rewrite from ideological positions, whether these positions assume historical breaks or evolution. In fact, Norman Podhoretz's current politics have no connection to his earlier pieces in *Partisan Review;* and none of the *Left Bank* or *Partisan Review* intellectuals can be squeezed into an ideological framework that ignores individual differences; nor can Lionel Trilling be considered a forerunner of neoconservatism. Such simplifications, according to both Debray and Mulhern, tend to be the province of "mediology." Their own simplifications, of course, are papered over by scholarship, as is their ideology. That is why *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities* is a bad book and why *The Left Bank,* though too detailed and occasionally tedious, is a rather good one—because it is a useful source of information about the period and the principal actors in it.

EDITH KURZWEIL

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A BORDERLINE EXISTENCE

WALTER BENJAMIN: THE STORY OF A FRIENDSHIP. By Gershom Scholem. Translated from the German by Harry Zohn. The Jewish Publication Society of America. $13.95.

Walter Benjamin, perhaps the greatest literary critic of his age, described himself in 1931 "like one who keeps afloat on a shipwreck by climbing to the top of a mast that is already crumbling." Nine years later, this highly idiosyncratic rebel—in the words of Hannah Arendt, perhaps the most peculiar Marxist ever produced by a movement that had more than its share of oddities—had committed suicide at the age of forty-eight, on the Franco-Spanish border while fleeing the Nazis. Known only to a small circle of cognoscenti during his lifetime, the writings of the shy, introverted Benjamin, one of the last representatives of a dying species—that of the European, cosmopolitan *homme de lettres*—were eventually rediscovered in the 1960s and given an honored place in the pantheon of Western Marxism. Bejamin's commitment to this ideology was, however, highly ambiguous (as with everything else in his secretive, enigmatic personality) and politically half-hearted, to say the least, so that his belated rehabilitation by the New Left may have obscured as much as it has revealed.

It is one of the great services of Gershom Scholem's fascinating and subtle memoir, based on a relationship extending almost twenty-five years, that it reconstitutes little-known biographical details concerning his friend's life and the intellectual comradeship between the two scholars, which help to correct the rather one-sided, conventional image of Walter Benjamin. Furthermore, over and above the authentic, personal portrait of Benjamin and his intellectual milieu (names like Adorno, Horkheimer, Fritz Sternberg, Brecht, Ernst Bloch, Siegfried Kracauer, Hofmannsthal, Buber, and Magnes constantly recur in these pages), the book offers a valuable, possibly unique insight into the mind of the late Gershom Scholem himself—surely, one of the most remarkable and innovative Jewish scholars of the twentieth century.

The two young men first met in Berlin in 1915, and their experiences with the German military (they both opposed the war from a

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radical anarchist standpoint) intensified the friendship. In Scholem's words, what united them from the beginning was "a resoluteness in pursuing our intellectual goals, rejection of our environment—which was basically the German-Jewish assimilated middle class—and a positive attitude toward metaphysics." Scholem continued to see in Benjamin "essentially a metaphysician, pure and simple, attracted by subjects which had little or no bearing on metaphysics"—such as dreams, hallucinations, clairvoyance, myths, graphology—and a scholar driven by a genuine theological search for "absolute experience." Benjamin's devotion to the spiritual, the central importance to him of the *religious* sphere (at least until 1927), his belief in the transcausal connection of things and their rootedness in God, emerge clearly from Scholem's account.

Although Benjamin knew nothing of Jewish history, of politics, and (except for Agnon and Bialik) of Hebrew or Yiddish literature, the theology and ethics of Judaism, along with religion, philosophy, and language, was a central theme in his conversations with Scholem and in their essay-like letters. Precisely because Benjamin's thought revolved around "theological" categories such as truth and revelation, problems of language ("the world essence . . . from which speech arises") and translation, as well as a deep-seated predisposition towards criticism and commentary, the world of Judaism retained a secret though ambivalent fascination for him. As his most important disciple, Theodor Adorno, once pointed out, Benjamin's philosophical essayism consisted "in treating profane texts as if they were sacred." Scholem, who to the end represented "Judaism in living form" for Benjamin and served as his mentor in the area of Kabbalah and its teachings on language, tried to encourage these metaphysical interests in a Jewish direction.

After Scholem's own emigration to Palestine in 1923 this proved more difficult, though Benjamin continued to keep the "Zionist" option open for himself and to promise his friend that he would shortly begin an intensive study of Hebrew. To a large extent Benjamin shared Scholem's conviction that German-Jewish involvement in politics and literature was built on a sham, and he evidently recognized in Zionism a legitimate revolt against the mendacity and self-deception of assimilated Jewish bourgeois life. His own wife Dora (the daughter of Herzl's biographer, Professor Leon Kellner) came from a Zionist milieu, and it is significant that in his correspondence with Scholem, Benjamin—even after becoming a

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Marxist of sorts—still seriously considered emigration to Palestine. On the other hand, while not swayed by communist political hostility to Zionism, Benjamin was impressed by such vulgar Marxist reductionist analyses of the "Jewish question" as Otto Heller's *Untergang des Judentums* (1931) and Max Horkheimer's *Die Juden und Europa* (1939), which were demolished with withering scorn by Scholem in their correspondence.

Benjamin himself attributed his constant postponement of emigration plans to Palestine to the "pathological vacillation" in his character and the pressure of other projects. In reality, this indecision may well have stemmed from a bitter realization that for him there was no personal salvation, and that there were no ideological solutions for his metaphysical estrangement and radical questioning of all traditions. Once the hope of an academic career miscarried (in 1925, his *habilitation* thesis, "The Origins of German Tragedy," was returned by the University of Frankfurt as utterly incomprehensible), Benjamin was forced to wage a seemingly endless struggle to keep himself afloat on the economic front. On bad terms with his parents, never at home in Germany where his ideas were too unconventional to find a place in the academic hierarchy, unprepared to "work for a living" and still vacillating between Zionism and Marxism, he could not—unlike Scholem—leap into the as yet disreputable world of Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism and thereby resolve his existential dilemmas.

With the breakup of his marriage and the dialectic disintegration of his metaphysical world view after 1927, the innate wanderlust, inner unrest, depressive traits, and dissatisfaction with the conditions of his life caught up with Benjamin. The literary communication with Scholem that had ripened under the pressure of physical separation and political crises, though it had never been free of tensions and misunderstandings, assumed a grimmer edge in the 1930s. Between 1927 and 1938 the two friends met only twice, on both occasions in Paris, which became Benjamin's home throughout the seven years of emigration, following Hitler's rise to power. Despite Scholem's loyalty to his friend and the feeling of personal trust that vibrates in the letters, it was, however, already clear that they were moving in opposite directions. Under the influence of his new friendship with Bertolt Brecht, Benjamin was drawing closer to a fitful kind of Marxism and away from Jewish concerns. Scholem, who disliked Brecht's communist politics and theoretical crudity,

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consistently warned his friend against the dangers to his thinking involved in trying to reconcile his mystical philosophy of language with historical materialism.

In the correspondence from the spring of 1931, enclosed in the appendix to this book, Scholem shrewdly exposes the self-deception behind much of Benjamin's Marxist theorizing, the "astonishing incompatibility" between his "*real* and *pretended* modes of thought." Never one to mince words, Scholem clearly regarded Brecht's influence as disastrous, though he continued to admire and appreciate Benjamin's undoubted originality as a theorist and a literary critic. The latter, however, defended his use of Marxism as a heuristic-methodological stimulus while remaining largely indifferent to questions of doctrine and carefully avoiding identification with Moscow or the German Communist Party.

Nonetheless, even Benjamin's association in the 1930s with the independent Marxist-oriented Institute for Social Research under Max Horkheimer, on whom he depended financially for his existence in Paris, was fraught with ambiguity and tension. With the exception of Adorno, the institute had no use for Benjamin's "undialectical" mode of thinking, his tendency to mysticism (this and his so-called Judaisms also got on Brecht's nerves), and his equivocacy about progress and modern industrial civilization. Even in his "Marxist" phase, Benjamin remained *sui generis,* an original or *inclassable,* whose essayistic work on the borderlines of philology, theology, literary criticism, history, and philosophy was too daring to be easily understood or accepted. His literary affinities remained with Goethe, Kafka and Proust, Baudelaire and the French surrealists; his personal obsessions were with memory, the nature of allegory, and the loss of experience—themes that appeared too remote at the time from the Marxist dialectic of history. Benjamin's "wide-eyed presentation of actuality," his literary experimentalism and concern with capturing the portrait of history through the most insignificant and fragmentary representations of reality, reflected a poetical mode of thought only superficially resembling the "Critical Theory" of Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School.

Scholem's account documents this inner tension between metaphysics and materialism and throws a new light on the personal factors that shaped Benjamin's intellectual development. With the rise of the fascist flood in the 1930s, external pressures, too, played their role in deepening the sense of isolation and despair that afflicted a

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whole generation of Jewish (and non-Jewish) intellectuals. Even the young Scholem, in Mandatory Palestine, was not immune to this mood of disillusionment, writing to Benjamin in August 1931 that "we were victorious too early" and that this victory in the visible realm was "the real demonism of Zionism." In the middle of some penetrating reflections on Kafka, it is instructive to read Scholem's own agonized reappraisal of so-called political solutions to the Jewish question.

> Between London and Moscow we strayed into the desert of Araby on our way to Zion, and our own hubris blocked the path that leads to our people. Thus all we have left is the productivity of one who is going down and knows it. It is this productivity in which I have buried myself for years, for, after all, where should the miracle of immortality be concealed if not here?

Following the Arab revolt of 1936 and Scholem's renewed outburst of pessimism, Benjamin—himself shocked by the growth of French anti-Semitism—wrote back that "a cosmopolis like Paris has become a very fragile thing, and if what I hear about Palestine is true, a wind blows there in which even Jerusalem may start swaying like a reed." As is clear from this letter of February 1937, Benjamin had still not completely abandoned thought of emigration to Palestine, though even Céline's wildly anti-Semitic *Bagatelles pour un massacre* and its reception by the French left-wing intelligentsia could not shake his love of Paris. However, the shock of the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939 struck deeper and may have contributed to reawakening Benjamin's latent suicidal inclinations. A bitter, veiled allusion (in a letter to Scholem of 11 January 1940) to the "activities of the zeitgeist that have provided the desert landscape of these days with markings unmistakable for old Bedouins like us" suggests something approaching terminal despair. Unable to swim with or against the tide in a shipwrecked Europe, trapped by the historical-political nightmare of encroaching Nazism and his own interminable bad luck, Benjamin put an end to his own life in September 1940. As Scholem puts it in a brief but moving final chapter on Benjamin's years in emigration, his suicide "was not a surprising irrational act but something he had prepared inwardly."

ROBERT S. WISTRICH

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LETTERS

To the Editor:

Leon Wieseltier writes (*Partisan Review,* 3, 1982) that I am "serene" about developments in Poland and have learned nothing from them ("Chomsky never learns"), citing my statement that the lessons to be drawn from the imposition of martial law are "virtually none." He omits the explanation, namely, that what I referred to as "the tragic events in Poland" merely confirm what had long been obvious, in particular, the extreme hostility of Leninist regimes to any independent workers movement, surely obvious from the earliest moments of the Bolshevik revolution when Lenin and Trotsky dismantled the Soviets and workers councils and instituted the "militarization of labor." In short, we cannot "learn" what we have always known. By Wieseltier's logic, I must also be "serene" about El Salvador since, for similar reasons, I see no lessons to be learned from U.S. involvement there.

Wieseltier's irate reaction to these truisms indicates that what happened in Poland did finally awaken him to realities that had long been obvious to others, who therefore had nothing to learn from them. Nothing in my remarks precluded such a possibility.

Wieseltier is also indignant about my observation that the libertarian left always rejected the designation of Leninist regimes as a form of "socialism" or "communism," on the grounds that "socialism will be free or it will not be at all" (Rocker). He writes that "with this semantic trick Chomsky slips by the experience of whole societies." The logic is, to use his words, "breathtaking," and applies with equal (i.e., zero) force to everyone who dismisses with contempt the self-designation of these regimes as "democratic."

Noam Chomsky
Cambridge, Massachusetts

To the Editor:

Leon Wieseltier is not known for sobriety, intelligence, honesty, or decency. This is not intended as a slur. It is just that I don't know anything about Wieseltier and have not consulted anyone else to whom he is known.

Partisan Review has chosen to publish Wieseltier's statement that I am not known for anticommunism. I would like to know the context. Whom did he consult to discover how I am known, or not known? What does he know about me?

It seems possible that Wieseltier's ignorance about me is as profound as my ignorance about him. That is my guess. On the other hand, if he has evidence for his implied slur, it should be published. Then I could deal with it.

Aryeh Neier
New York, New York

Leon Wieseltier replies:

Noam Chomsky's objections to the Soviet system are unobjectionable. But American involvement in El Salvador exercises him much

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more than Russian involvement in Poland; his massive two volumes on *The Political Economy of Human Rights* (which were unjustly unreviewed, hence unjustly uncriticized) are all about the colonial sins of the United States, and not at all about the colonial sins of the Soviet Union. You would think, from Chomsky's political writings, that there is no Soviet colonialism to consider. No, let me be precise, lest there come another letter: you would think, from the amount of space allotted in Chomsky's writings to the consideration of Soviet colonialism, that it is by far a lesser evil. It will not do for him to plead that Soviet abuses of human rights are "obvious." They are no more or less "obvious" than American abuses of human rights. So diligent a student of the media as Chomsky should know that in such matters nothing is "obvious." There is no story of suffering that does not bear repeating. Chomsky repeats only some—from which it may be concluded that he does not, as he claims, hate them all equally.

Chomsky properly locates the origins of the Soviet repression in "the earliest moments of the Bolshevik revolution," which many of those who sign statements with him do not. This honesty about Soviet history, however, fails him when the integrity of his ideology is at stake. Chomsky refuses, in his response to the Jaruzelski regime, to face squarely the responsibility of certain words and ideas for the events that he deplores. It is true that Leninism is not socialism (I never said it was); but it is also true that socialism had something to do with the emergence of Leninism. (Democracy, contrary to Chomsky's view, did not.) Chomsky cannot simply deny socialism's relation to the results of the revolution and change the subject. He is in the unenviable position of all those who cling to principles that have had an experience of power. I imagine, for example, that Chomsky expects Zionists to feel implicated by Sharon's plans for the Palestinians. But they need no longer. Zionism will be just or it will not be at all.

I agree with Aryeh Neier that we have a lot of catching up to do. But I did not slur him; I criticized him. My criticism was based upon an impression of his views gained from his articles in *The Nation*, and I stand by it. His anticommunism is sincere, but it is *sotto voce*. He writes more angrily and more often about other forms of dictatorship. A division of labor in the democratic left, perhaps; except that Neier has himself admitted, in his statement about Sontag's speech, to something more. He is inhibited from getting carried away as an anticommunist by a fear of mistaken ideological identity. He attacks communism like a man worried about his reputation. These attacks are accompanied, therefore, by doctrinal distinctions between the right kind of anticommunism and the wrong kind of anticommunism. In drawing such distinctions he is, of course, being an intellectual, that is, he is making his position precise; but he is also being a little lukewarm. It is a matter of emphasis where emphasis matters. Sontag's strictures upon his statement were entirely correct.

On the other hand, it may be that around *The Nation* he is known for anticommunism.

Leon Wieseltier
Washington, D.C.

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